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CONCEPT ARTIST

Exploring the best concept art in the world of games and film

A lot has changed in concept art since the early 1990s, when artists like Craig Mullins and Kev Jenkins started pushing digital art's potential. The tools have been revolutionised, and at all stages of the production process art teams have grown in importance... yet some things remain the same.

While 'concept art' has become an umbrella term for everything from speed-painted environments to illustrative, highly rendered character art, the finest examples are still rooted in the same foundations of any great art: a sound understanding of values, anatomy, directional detail, form and function. They still have a great story underneath the strokes, and spring from a fundamentally compelling concept. The clue's in the title!

In this special edition, created by ImagineFX magazine, we look at the work of the finest concept artists today – from early pioneers to breakthrough artists. We've had a blast working with all the phenomenal talent featured in these pages, and we hope it inspires you to go create your own art.

FUTURE

CONCEPT ARTIST

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Bookazine Editorial
Compiled by **Philippa Grafton & Newton Ribeiro**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**

ImagineFX Editorial
Editor **Rob Redman**
Art Editor **Daniel Vincent**

Contributors
Dominic Carter, Martin Cooper, Kerrie Hughes, Sammy Maine, Ben Maxwell, Alice Pattillo, Ed Ricketts, Barbara Robertson, Garrick Webster

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Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely, Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman**

Printed by William Gibbons, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

Concept Artist Sixth Edition (CTB4293)

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
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Chief executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief financial officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

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ImagineFX PRESENTS
bookazine series





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"I like to be inspired by the real and push the composition to the next level"
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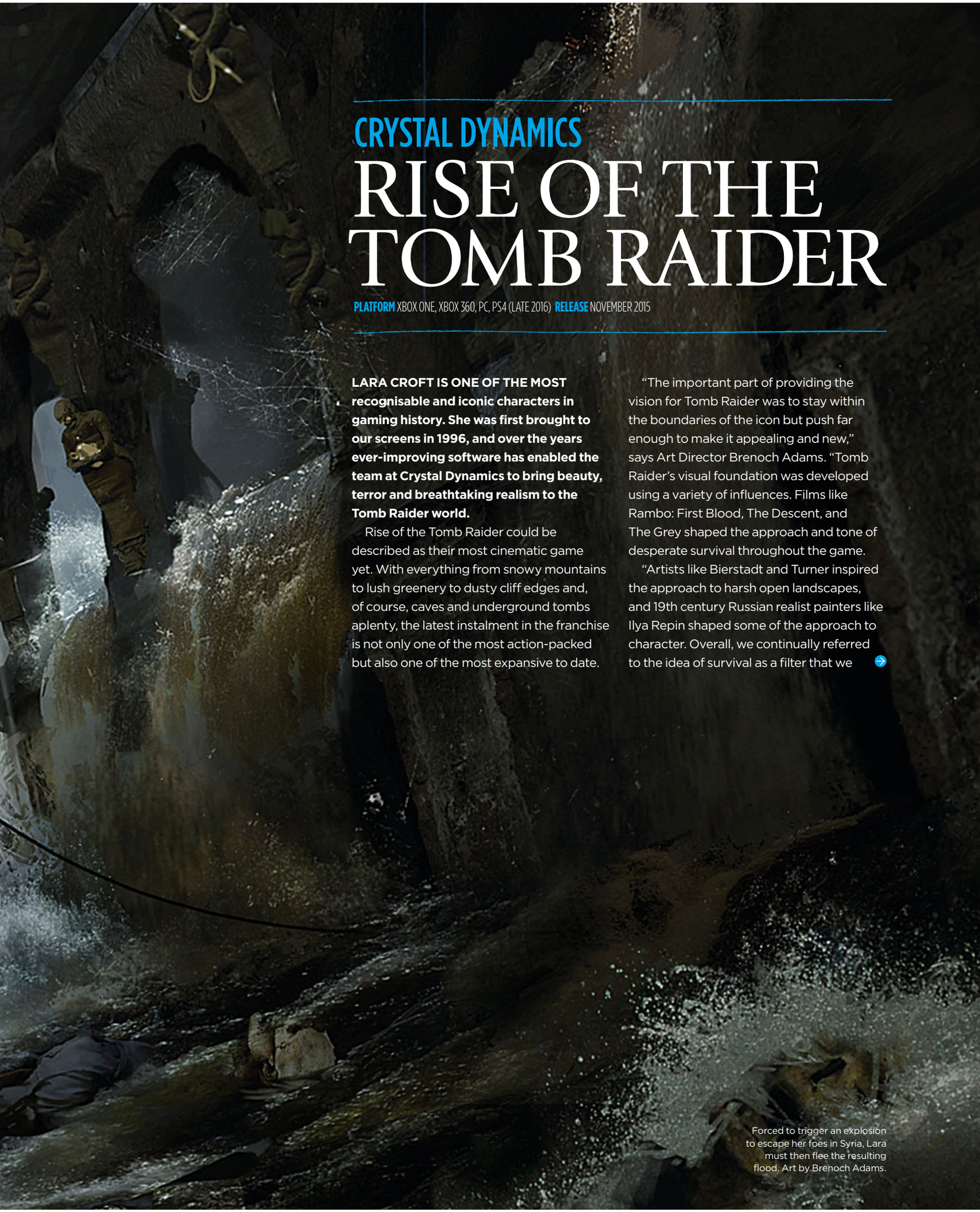
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Every AAA game and blockbuster film has an art story to tell.





CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

PLATFORM XBOX ONE, XBOX 360, PC, PS4 (LATE 2016) **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2015

LARA CROFT IS ONE OF THE MOST recognisable and iconic characters in gaming history. She was first brought to our screens in 1996, and over the years ever-improving software has enabled the team at Crystal Dynamics to bring beauty, terror and breathtaking realism to the Tomb Raider world.

Rise of the Tomb Raider could be described as their most cinematic game yet. With everything from snowy mountains to lush greenery to dusty cliff edges and, of course, caves and underground tombs aplenty, the latest instalment in the franchise is not only one of the most action-packed but also one of the most expansive to date.

"The important part of providing the vision for Tomb Raider was to stay within the boundaries of the icon but push far enough to make it appealing and new," says Art Director Brenoch Adams. "Tomb Raider's visual foundation was developed using a variety of influences. Films like Rambo: First Blood, The Descent, and The Grey shaped the approach and tone of desperate survival throughout the game.

"Artists like Bierstadt and Turner inspired the approach to harsh open landscapes, and 19th century Russian realist painters like Ilya Repin shaped some of the approach to character. Overall, we continually referred to the idea of survival as a filter that we

Forced to trigger an explosion to escape her foes in Syria, Lara must then flee the resulting flood. Art by Brenoch Adams.



LEFT The ruins of a Byzantine tower conceal a crucial artefact. Art by Michael Baytion.

RIGHT Narrowly escaping an avalanche, Lara faces new terrors in Bear Valley. Art by Brenoch Adams.

THE ART DEPARTMENT



BRENOCH ADAMS
ART DIRECTOR



MICHAEL BAYTION
SENIOR ARTIST



BRANDON RUSSELL
ARTIST

applied to nearly everything we designed, ensuring that there was a consistent ominous beauty to the game."

FRESH PERSPECTIVES

Ominous beauty indeed: gorgeous sunset skies are a backdrop to imminent danger, Lara's gleaming skin is adorned with cuts and scratches, flowing crystal-clear waters open doors to the unknown. It's all incredibly impressive, but producing the art for any Tomb Raider game was always going to be a tall order, with so many die-hard fans to satisfy. Adams says joining Crystal Dynamics only in 2008 allowed him to approach the project with a fresh, outsider perspective.

"Being distant from the franchise initially was the best way to keep pushing forward – designing Lara and her world was a result of not being overwhelmingly attached to her past," he explains. "Through the process of experimentation and iteration, we were able to latch on to certain key aspects of visual development that resonated with both fans and newcomers to Tomb Raider.

"The most enjoyable part of the creative process is the blank canvas that's presented, providing as much storytelling as possible in all aspects of design, and the joy of working with a team of talented artists to reveal the gem that gets people excited to make a great game."

"I don't really think about the pressure when I'm in the thick of it," adds artist Brandon Russell. "There's a bit of nervous tension in the studio when the game launches, and it hits you full blast when you see the impact it has on the fans."



Extra costumes are available as downloadable content. Character iterations by Brandon Russell.

"We continually referred to the idea of survival as a filter for all we designed"





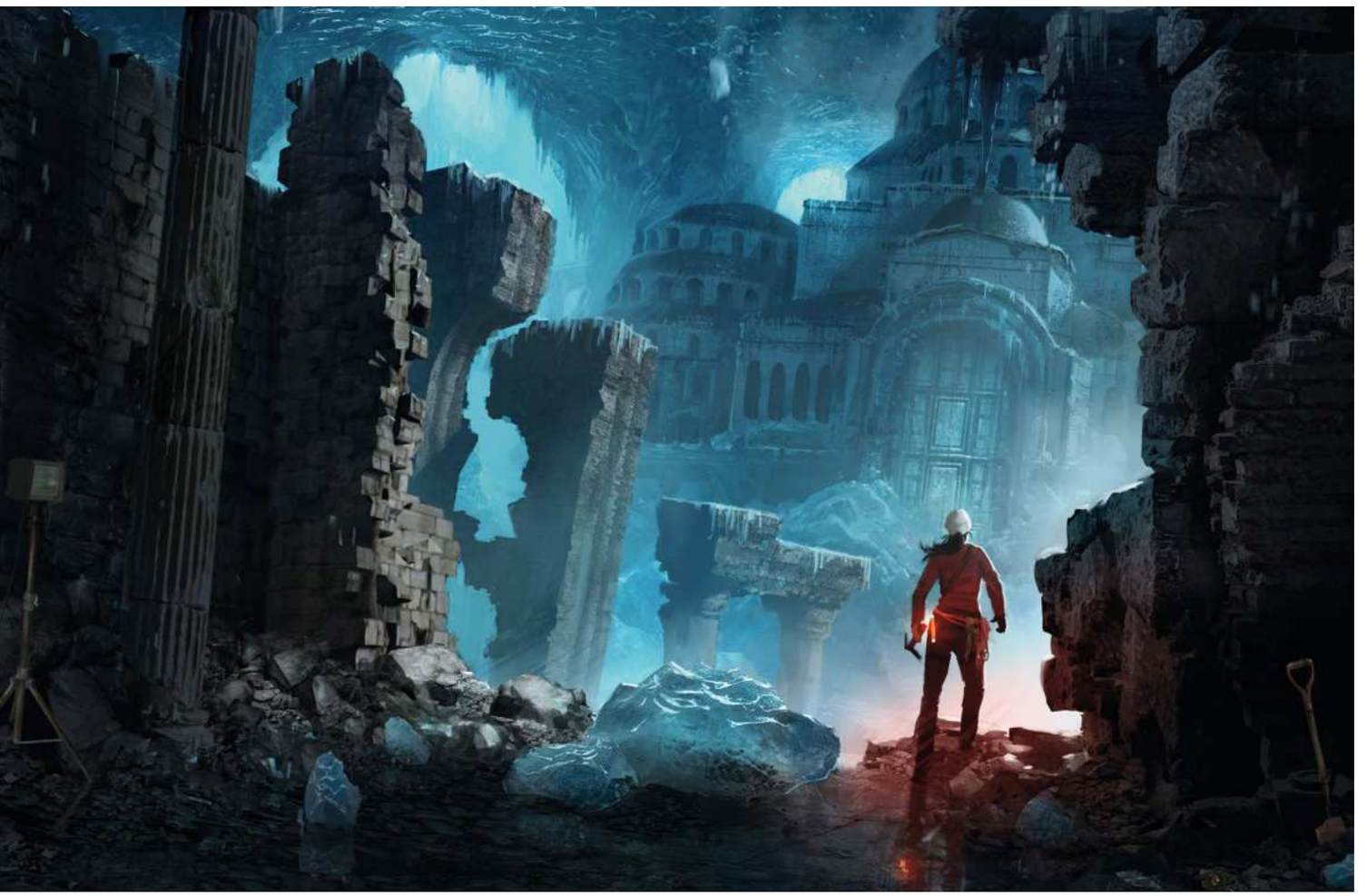
LEFT Lara is forced to improvise tools and weapons from whatever she can scavenge. Art by Brenoch Adams.



RIGHT Lara's first sighting of the Lost City, as painted by Brandon Russell.

BELOW Brandon paints a Remnant village in a remote Siberian valley.





That's when you feel it, and I'm thankful to be a part of something this special." As well as those early painters, Russell also cites modern-age films such as Nolan's Batman series and Inception for their inspiration in creating the game's lighting and filmic tone.

The entire team at Crystal Dynamics is extremely passionate and, as senior artist Michael Baytion explains, the success of the art stems from a collaborative approach. "While some concept artists like to wall themselves off and paint or draw in solitude, myself included sometimes, collaboration always yields better results in-game," he enthuses. "We've had great success when we work directly with the developers. The studio is fairly small, with tons of talent, and artists are encouraged to step outside of their discipline and acquire new skills."

CREATING A WORLD

Concept art plays a huge role in inspiring the other artists working on the game. For example, Russell pictured a Remnant village for the environment artist team: "I wanted to hint at what the Remnant people might do during their daily lives and give our environment artists an idea of how to use that narrative to create a believable world."

Russell uses Photoshop CS6 on a 22-inch Cintiq for all of his concept art. His favourite piece is an image of a Byzantine ice tomb, created in collaboration with artists Mark Castanon and Brian Horton. "I really wanted to capture a sense of scale in this piece whilst also showing how fragile and dangerous Lara's surroundings may be."

Russell also produced alternative outfit concepts for Lara as downloadable content. He explains that Lara's outfits are always heavily scrutinised during production. "Being able to push those boundaries for DLC was a ton of fun," he remembers.

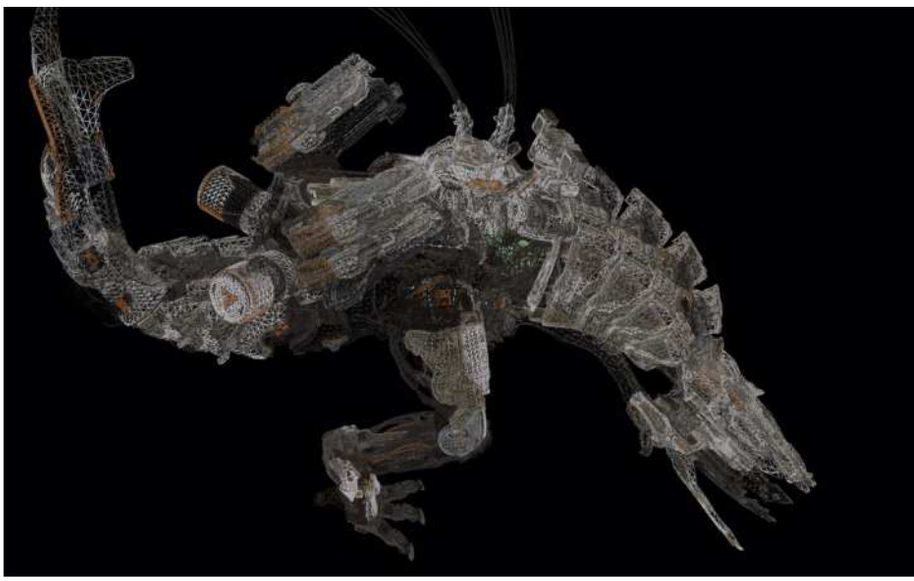
Touching upon most of the levels within the game, Baytion adds that in addition to the concept art, the team often work in-engine for lighting, set dressing and vistas. "We use a lot of reference because we strive for a believable filmic look, fidelity of the environment and surroundings, and grounding Lara in the world. I do really like when I learn something new artistically while working on a piece. But overall, if an image relays the proper info to the team, whatever that is – inspiration, set dressing, lighting, or a specific moment – then I'm happy."

"We use a lot of reference because we strive for a believable filmic look and grounding Lara in the world"



GUERRILLA GAMES
HORIZON ZERO DAWN

PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 4 **RELEASE** LATE 2016



SONY'S FORTHCOMING ACTION ROLE-playing game for the PlayStation 4 looks set to be epic in every way. Developed by Guerrilla Games – which also produced the massive Killzone series – it's the company's first attempt at an RPG rather than an out-and-out shooter.

In terms of art, HZD offers delicious possibilities and is something of a dream for Guerrilla's concept artists. It's been over a thousand years since human civilisation, and much of humanity with it, was wiped from the face of the planet. Nature has reclaimed the landscape, resulting in a lush, vibrant world filled with the swaying dynamic foliage that's rapidly replacing the particle shower as this console generation's favourite effect.

Horizon's environments are also fully destructible, which is one heck of an achievement in a world this size. But even

THE ART DEPARTMENT



JAN-BART VAN BEEK
ART DIRECTOR



LUC DE HAAN
CHARACTER CONCEPT ARTIST



LLOYD ALLAN
CONCEPT ARTIST



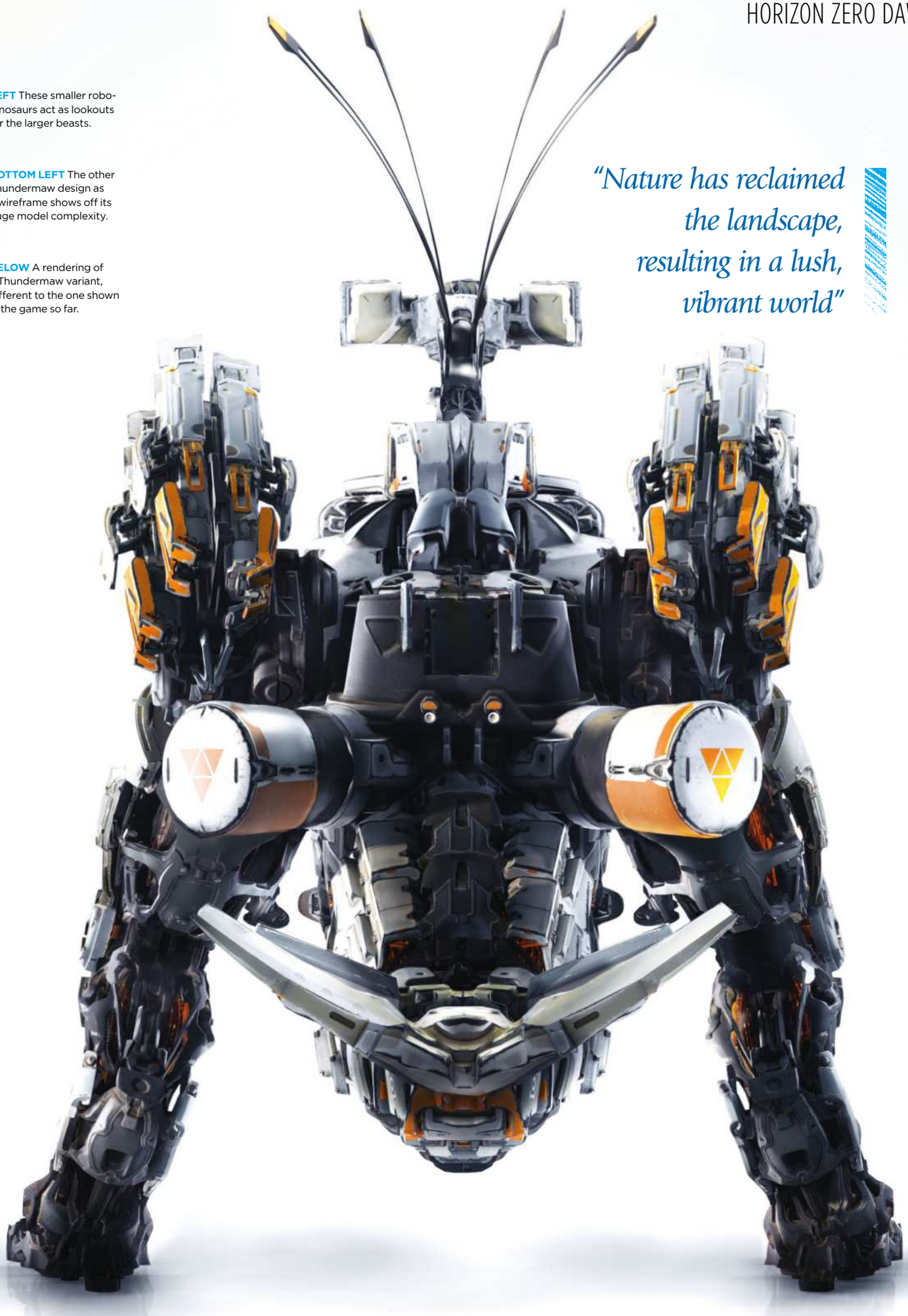
ILYA GOLITSYN
CONCEPT ARTIST

LEFT These smaller robo-dinosaurs act as lookouts for the larger beasts.

BOTTOM LEFT The other Thundermaw design as a wireframe shows off its huge model complexity.

BELOW A rendering of a Thundermaw variant, different to the one shown in the game so far.

"Nature has reclaimed the landscape, resulting in a lush, vibrant world"







LEFT Main character Aloy sports the latest in post-apocalyptic, do-it-yourself chic. Cool bow, though.

ABOVE A concept rendering of the sort of lush landscapes present throughout the game.

when great big robo-dinosaurs aren't clattering through rock formations, this is a clear step-up from the Dutch studio's previous game, Killzone: Shadow Fall. The two share an engine – albeit one that has been worked on heavily since Shadow Fall's release in 2013 – and there are visual ties between them, too, in particular their use of light and lens flare.

That colossal robo-dinosaur is one of the more impressive pieces of graphical tech that's been shown off in the game so far. The Thundermaw, as it's known, is 80ft long, 33ft high, constructed from 550,000 polygons and shielded with over 90 individual pieces of armour that have to be removed during gameplay.

ON THE HUNT

Character design is also rife with possibilities. Guerrilla wanted to emphasise than man is no longer top of the food chain, and thus is forced to hunt with more primitive weapons such as bow and arrows, while the dinosaur-like robots are equipped with far more impressive weapons. Main character Aloy sports clothes made entirely of natural resources, a rag-tag assemblage of cloth, leather, feathers and other materials scavenged from the environment.

The game's lush environments are matched by the real-time day and night system, which enables the artists to create beautiful sunsets and sunrises as well as other atmospheric phenomena. Rather than being static painted 'skyboxes', skies are fully rendered, with clouds as volumetric graphics created in real time and modelled after real cloud formations, giving the artists unprecedented control over them.

In terms of art production for the game, Guerrilla outsourced assets on a very large scale and as a result had a very small internal asset art team, but a relatively large concept art team. Indeed, the scope of outsourcing required a very mature outsourcing pipeline and presented unique advantages and problems in keeping everything organised.

The result is a truly luscious and stunning game that continues to delight its players.

"That colossal robo-dinosaur is one of the more impressive pieces of graphical tech that's been shown off in the game so far"



Art of Rocksteady's Batman: Arkham Asylum, Arkham City & Arkham Knight by Rocksteady Studios and Daniel Wallace © Abrams Books.



LEFT Concept piece by Kan Muftic. Players see this "bat's-eye view" when gliding from point to point.



BELOW Zeppelins, parade balloons, elevated roads and soaring towers give Gotham a vertical scale.

ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS

BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

PLATFORM PLAYSTATION 4, XBOX ONE, PC **RELEASE** JUNE 2015

BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT IS GAME studio Rocksteady's third and final Arkham tale. With two hit titles under their belt, the team wanted the aesthetics of the third to be bigger, better and even more epic. But how do you improve on an already winning recipe? Simple. You start early.

"I started working on Batman: Arkham Knight in June 2011, while the rest of the team was busy putting the final touches on Batman: Arkham City," says art director David Hego. "I always try to start early on a new project, so it gives us as much time as possible to prepare the work and art vision before we start building assets.

"It also allows us to think about great locations that could bring something interesting visually. At this point, the choice of locations can even influence some parts of the story as it is still in its infancy. Also, the early stages are when important meetings happen with the game director to talk about the scope and the goals we want to achieve.

"Over the concept stage (and sometimes even a bit before) we try to develop and finalise the different environments of the game to create an interesting visual journey. For Batman: Arkham Knight, the idea was to create contrast, between the movie studio, Ace Chemicals, Stagg airship and Arkham Knight's hideout. In parallel, we spent a lot of time working on the villains and their visual design, looking at ways to make them evolve since appearing in the last game. It is always interesting to bring something new to even a well-known character like Penguin. We ask ourselves questions such as 'What's happened to him since last time, and what kind of story could we create visually?'"

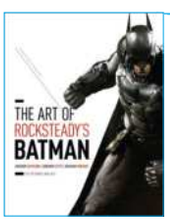
"Over the concept stage (and even a bit before) we try to develop environments to create an interesting visual journey"

OPPOSITE The artists viewed Batman as a military commander, using the colours of his armour to create camouflage patterns.









ART OF ROCKSTEADY'S BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM, ARKHAM CITY & ARKHAM KNIGHT

This 300-page book chronicles the making of Rocksteady's Batman: Arkham video game series.

THE ART DEPARTMENT



DAVID HEGO
ART DIRECTOR



RICHARD ANDERSON
SENIOR ARTIST



OLIVER ODMARK
CONCEPT ARTIST



PREVIOUS PAGE One of the first concept pieces for the game by Kan Muftic. It's a David Hego favourite: "It's always very interesting to look back to where we come from and reflect on a three year journey."

ABOVE An experiment in creating a fake Gotham City, reminiscent of the film sets in Gotham Studios, but in this case part of Scarecrow's hallucination. The idea was dropped later on. Art by Kan Muftic.



LEFT Concept art by Kan Muftic of the Batmobile heading into Gotham's neon-lit Chinatown.



ABOVE Intersecting elevated bridges provide visual variety and an invitation to explore. Art by Kan Muftic.



ABOVE Arkham Knight introduces a player-controlled Batmobile. Art by Sixmorevodka studio.

It's at this point that the environment and character artists began to get involved, creating art examples and render targets that were representative of the final look of the game, in terms of style, both technically and artistically.

In order to achieve the desired look, it was vital that the Rocksteady artists stuck to the game's specific artistic vision. "There was definitely a set tone," says concept artist Oliver Odmark, "a style and a mood inherent in the 'Arkhamverse'. I played and loved Batman: Arkham Asylum and Arkham City before coming to Rocksteady, so I was very familiar with the whole thing. Still, there were a few times where we did go crazy and we had to take a step back and revise. But I think it's healthy to try things out so you can get all your bad ideas out of your system!"

"We wanted the same attention to detail in every corner and back alley"

CLEAR VISION

One design aspect that the artists did let their creative hair down on was Batman's infamous car. "Creating the design of the Batmobile was an interesting challenge," says Hego. "We went through several iterations before being happy that the design and gameplay were fused in the right way. It was very important to make sure that we were creating synergy between Batman and the Batmobile."

Having nailed the aesthetics early on meant the team were then able to tackle technological challenges not encountered on the previous titles. It was anything but simple. There were many considerations when bringing Arkham Knight to life.

"Arkham Knight was a big challenge compared to the two previous games (Arkham Asylum and Arkham City)," Hego comments. "We moved to the new generation of consoles, so we had a major rethink in terms of benchmarking the visual quality with the new technology available to us. The quality of the art advanced a lot by experimenting with new techniques such as physically based rendering.

"The scope of building Gotham City to the quality we set was also very challenging. We wanted to keep the same attention to detail to every corner and back alley of the city, and it was a massive labour of handcrafted art. With every new Arkham game we've focused on bringing something new to the player, and I think that attitude is reflected in the finished product."



LEFT A series of silhouettes showing the various designs considered for Verse's wooden arm.

OPPOSITE Ultimately the more complex creations were dropped in favour of a much more human-like arm design.

LIONHEAD STUDIOS

FABLE LEGENDS

PLATFORM XBOX ONE, PC **RELEASE** CANCELLED



ABOVE Verse's musical instrument/weapon also went through various incarnations during development.

AS ONE OF THE PLAYABLE HEROES OF Albion in the sadly now-cancelled online multiplayer game Fable Legends from Lionhead Studios, Verse was to be an all-out assault character, a storyteller who uses her instruments to both smash foes and slow down time.

"We wanted to create an amazing smuggler-bard-seafarer, which informed our initial inspiration and visual reference gathering," explains Ross Dearsley, concept artist for the game. "Rather than having a purely 'pirate'-styled design, we decided to introduce some exotic influences to the character, and we chose an Eastern 'Sinbad' style of direction for the clothing elements."

As part of the character development process, the team discussed the idea of the stereotypical wooden leg often found in classic pirate character designs. However, to differentiate Verse a bit more they opted instead for a wooden arm. "We also looked at the idea of the musical instrument being part of the wooden arm – but we rejected this in favour of a distinct and separate instrument accessory and weapon," Ross adds. "We developed a backstory idea that the instrument and the arm might have been carved from the same magical tree and have a unique connection."

THE ART DEPARTMENT



ROSS DEARSLEY
CONCEPT ARTIST



"Rather than use a purely 'pirate'-styled design, we decided to introduce some exotic Eastern influences"

ATOMHAWK

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

PRODUCTION COMPANY MARVEL STUDIOS **RELEASE** 2015

ATOMHAWK HAS PRODUCED CONCEPT art for film and gaming clients since 2009, and in that time has built up a close working relationship with Marvel Studios' creative team. Having already created concept art for Thor: The Dark World and Guardians of the Galaxy, Atomhawk's work for Avengers: Age of Ultron built on the foundations of its previous projects as well as tackling new challenges.

"The Avengers films have a much greater sense of reality and a lot less of the myth and fantasy which were so central to designing for Thor and Guardians," explains Ron Ashtiani, one of Atomhawk's Art Directors. "The overall creative and artistic style of the film had already really been set by the previous movie, Avengers Assemble. The look and mood of both are very much focussed around precision and technology."

With the work being run past Director Joss Whedon, four Atomhawk artists and





LEFT A team of artists created 15 concepts for Hawkeye's farmhouse in three weeks.

RIGHT All of the concept art was created in Photoshop, with the work split between Atomhawk artists and a legion of freelancers.







ABOVE The detailed production designs had to be translated into physical effects or closely recreated with VFX.

THE ART DEPARTMENT



RON ASHTIANI
ART DIRECTOR



STUART ELLIS
PRINCIPAL ARTIST



"There's always pressure to explore ideas very quickly, hit a gem and then work on the polish"

a large team of freelancers created concepts from specific briefs that covered vehicles, action shots and locations. Two Atomhawk artists worked on technology focussed designs, including the helicarrier rafts and Leviathan Chamber, while the other two concentrated on Hawkeye's farmhouse and Ultron's robot factory.

"For the helicarrier raft, the brief was all about taking reference from modern technical design and creating a highly detailed image that could be replicated as a physical set," Ron explains. "We were also provided with reference material which we were then able to build on and use to create our own interpretation, within the parameters of the brief and the creative style of the film."

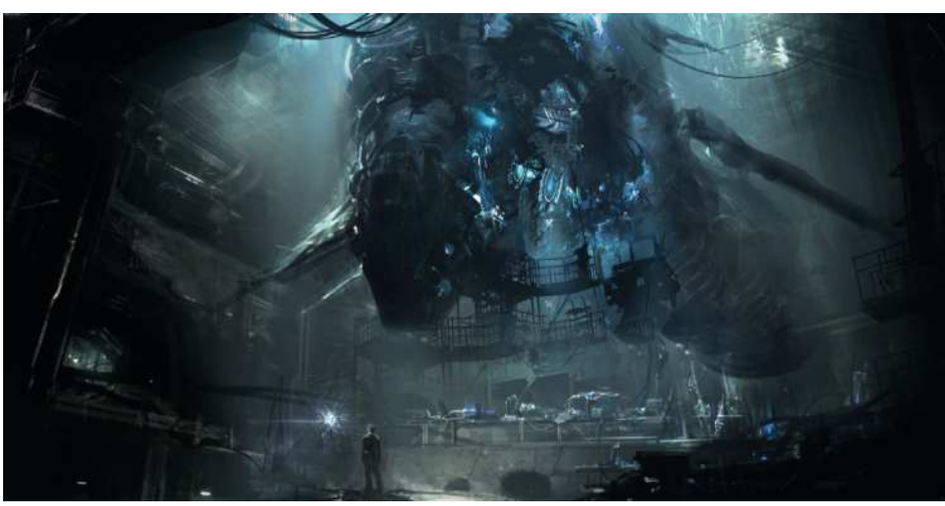
CREATIVE CHALLENGES

For Hawkeye's farmhouse, Principal Artist Stuart Ellis reveals, "There wasn't really a brief per se but rather a selection of images that [Production Designer] Charles Wood had collected as a point of reference. He explained that what he was trying to achieve was a homely, American-style farmhouse situated in a hidden valley somewhere in the US. This image was more about evoking mood and emotion and creating a contrast with the movie's other locations than communicating the design for a set. A couple of days into the work Joss Whedon handed our Production Director an image of his own house as a point of reference, and the design moved on from there."

Despite the guidance from the briefs and the production team, the artists couldn't schedule a lot of feedback loops and needed to come up with a winning design almost immediately. "When working on films the deadlines are always tight, which means there is always pressure to iterate on and explore your creative ideas very quickly, hit a gem and then work on the polish of the design," says Ron. However, having worked on two Marvel movies previously ensured Ron and his team were experienced enough

Concept art such as the helicarrier had to create a mood that contrasted with the film's other locations.

RIGHT World War 2 missile factories provided the inspiration for the Leviathan Chamber.



to deal with this challenge. "Sometimes working to a tight deadline can bring out the best results!"

The Atomhawk team have become keen followers of the Marvel franchise through their work, but Ron reveals that this isn't just because the studio is such a huge name. "It's always exciting to work on a big title and we're always itching for the movie to come out so we can see it ourselves and also show and talk about our work. But really it's the creative challenges that enthuse, excite and bring out the best in our artists."

DREAMWORKS
KUNG FU PANDA 3

PRODUCTION COMPANY DREAMWORKS ANIMATION **RELEASE** 2016

PANDAS. THESE LAID-BACK, BAMBOO-chomping oriental bears aren't something you'd immediately associate with Kung Fu (apart perhaps from their shared Chinese origins), and yet the animated story of unlikely martial arts hero bear Po proved to be a box office smash. The third movie in DreamWorks' hit Kung Fu Panda series meant more martial arts master characters and additional locations to design, all brought to fruition by a talented art team headed by Art Director Max Boas and Production Designer Raymond Zibach.

With the overall style already established from the previous films, the sequel gave the team a lot of creative freedom to explore new ideas with confidence, says Max. For Raymond it was simply a matter of expanding their world, and there was never a problem with keeping it fresh. "We are still constantly making discoveries of where this thing could go," adds Raymond. "I love that we have always had several styles of animation within the films."

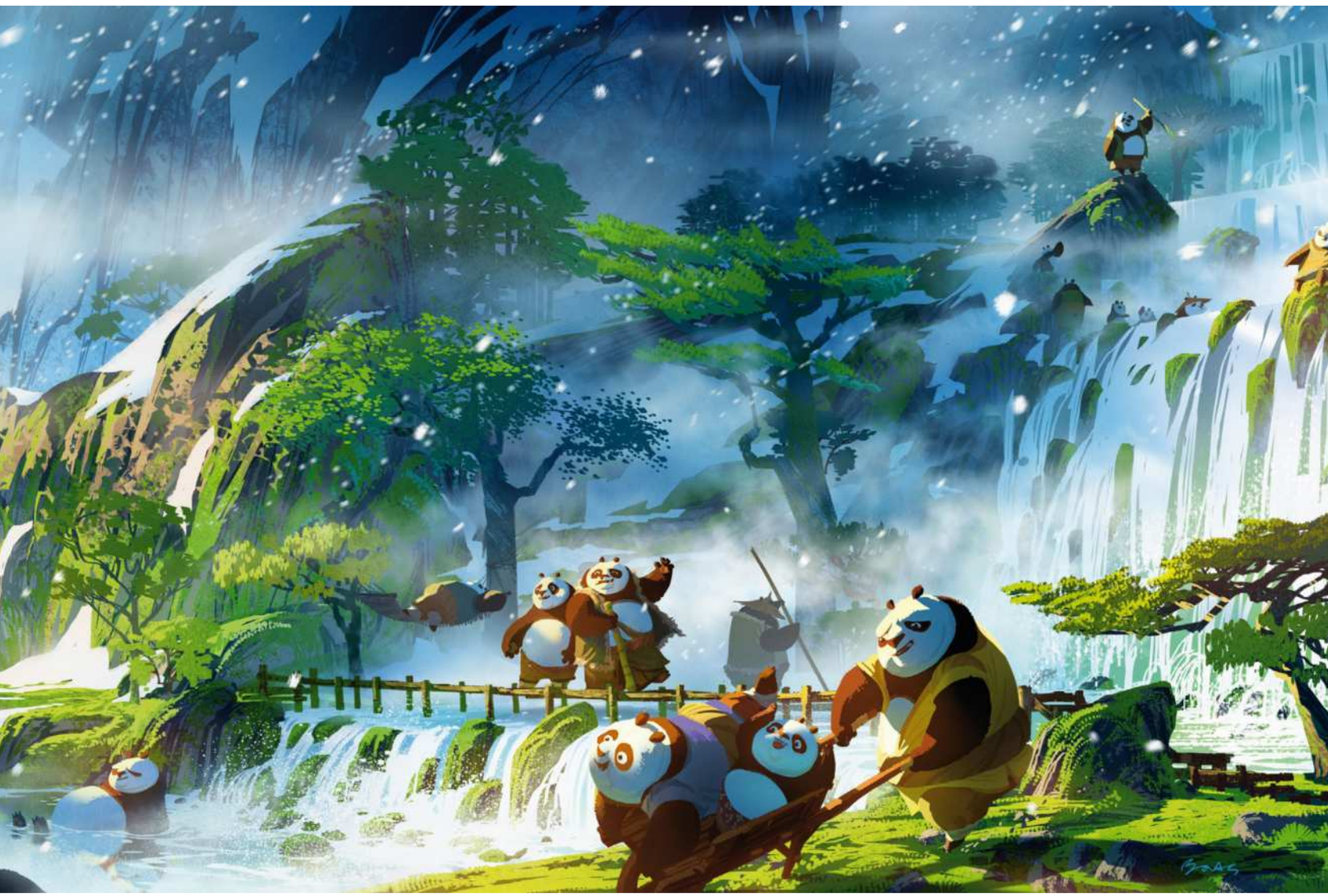
ORIENTAL INSPIRATIONS

Kung Fu Panda 3 was in co-production with Oriental DreamWorks, meaning that if the team ever had a question about cultural accuracy, they could ask their fellow crew members in Shanghai.

"We did a lot of research on Chinese culture that we used as reference and inspiration," says Max. "We tried to stay as true as possible to the Chinese architecture, clothing, etc. of that era." Raymond adds that the team also looked to traditional ink and watercolour paintings: "There's a graphic quality that these masters brought compositionally, which has inspired so much modern art. To try to do that art justice is one of the reasons we try to let the matte paintings be paintings and not photos."









ABOVE The new film explores more of the hidden village of pandas which was revealed at the end of Kung Fu Panda 2.

LEFT The designers were inspired by ten days at a panda sanctuary beneath Mount Qingcheng in the Sichuan region of China.

THE ART DEPARTMENT



MAX BOAS
ART DIRECTOR



RAYMOND ZIBACH
PRODUCTION DESIGNER

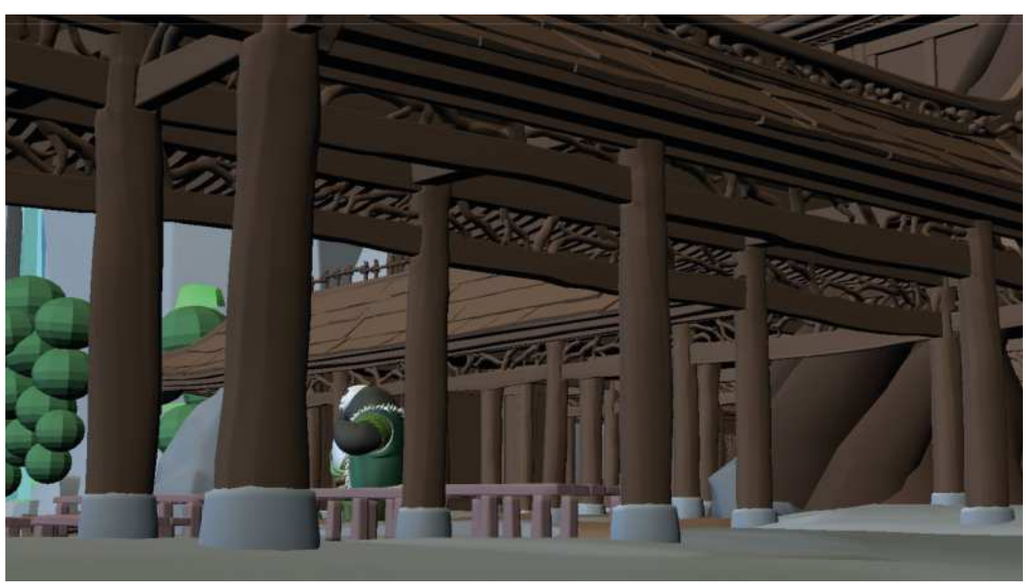
"We did a lot of research and tried to stay as true as possible to the Chinese architecture and clothing of that era"





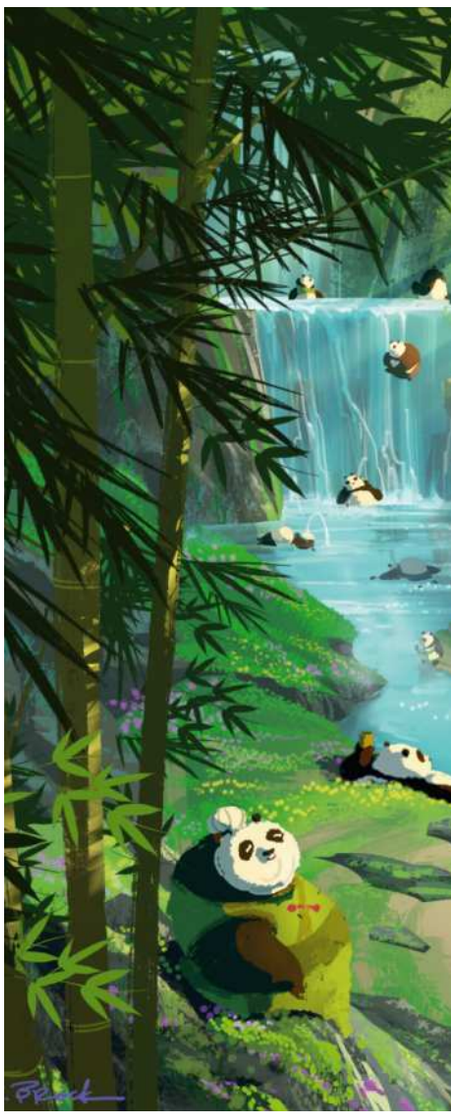
ABOVE The design draws on the idea of a Shangri-La where the pandas are hidden from the world.

LEFT Many elements are based on the authentic rustic architecture that the team saw in Sichuan.



RIGHT Max Boas built the panda village in Maya to visualise the space in 3D and work out its scale.





"We had fun with the lighting design, using bold colour combinations and graphic light beams – a signature Kung Fu Panda style"

The team had two new major locations to design: Panda Village and the Spirit Realm. Panda Village began with some quick conceptual paintings by Max. Building the village in Maya to see the space in 3D and roughly blocking in mountains for scale and landmark placement, the team could use this model to scout where different scenes could take place based on the current story ideas. From there, they worked on more detailed illustrations and paintings.

"The needs that the story demands are first and foremost," explains Raymond. "We then want to be inspired by real places, so we'll do some research. Next we want to take that inspiration and exaggerate it. We never wanted our world to be a replica of China but more like a legendary version of it."

PACKING A PUNCH

When it came to characters, designer Nico Marlet was responsible for the concepts. "Nico has been the constant. His genius is the main ingredient in our character style," explains Raymond. Nico designed most of the hard-working pandas we meet in the Panda Village, adorned in traditional Chinese garb. The team made a conscious decision to have Po be the only panda in the village to have a bare chest, so that he would stand out among the crowd of pandas.

Kung Fu Panda 3 also sees the addition of spirit world spawned villain Kai. "Kai was always a more mythological type character and we always imagined him as otherworldly, almost as a Kung Fu god," Raymond reveals. "Some of the earlier designs were quite pushed," adds Max. "The villainous yak was drawn with glowing energy in the shape of a flame surrounding him. He had four arms, a cape and a magic hand that was made up of roots that could send beetle warriors through the ground to fight other masters."

It was Jen Yu Nelson's direction that really encouraged the team to push the envelope visually. "It was this encouragement that gave us the confidence to go in creative directions that we might not have otherwise and enabled us to push things further artistically for the film," explains Max. "We had a lot of fun with the lighting design, using bold colour combinations and graphic light beams, which is a signature of the Kung Fu Panda style."



ABOVE LEFT Although magical, the village had to feel real as we experience it through Po's eyes.

ABOVE To help create distinctive characters, the team designed nearly 30 different panda variants.

RIGHT Like Po himself, the pandas love fun and food. The realism of the settings is mixed with a little magic.









INDUSTRIAL LIGHT & MAGIC

STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

PRODUCTION COMPANY LUCASFILM **RELEASE** 2015

SINCE 1976, STAR WARS HAS CRAFTED out a signature style that makes its art as iconic as its movies. 2015's The Force Awakens was a box office smash hit and, while there are many factors behind that success, from the stirring storyline to the memorable characters, there's no doubt the look and even small details are integral to the appeal of the Star Wars universe.

As a child, ILM concept artist Ryan Church was entranced. "I was talking about this with James Clyne," says Church. "We both saw Episode IV when we were children and it made such an impression. The hugeness of shapes. The colours. The first half of the movie is tan and brown, the second half with the Death Star is black and white. The first time you see green is when your friends are reunited. It was brilliant. Even a one-year-old could react to that. Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston were the essence of Star Wars, really – their drawings plus what was built and captured on film."

TOP LEFT An early concept sketch of BB-8 with "treads" for better traction by concept artist Christian Alzmann.

ABOVE James Clyne's design for Han Solo's cargo hauler turned out to be the last major vehicle approval for the film.



THE ART DEPARTMENT



JAMES CLYNE
ART DIRECTOR



KEVIN JENKINS
ART DIRECTOR



RYAN CHURCH
CONCEPT ARTIST

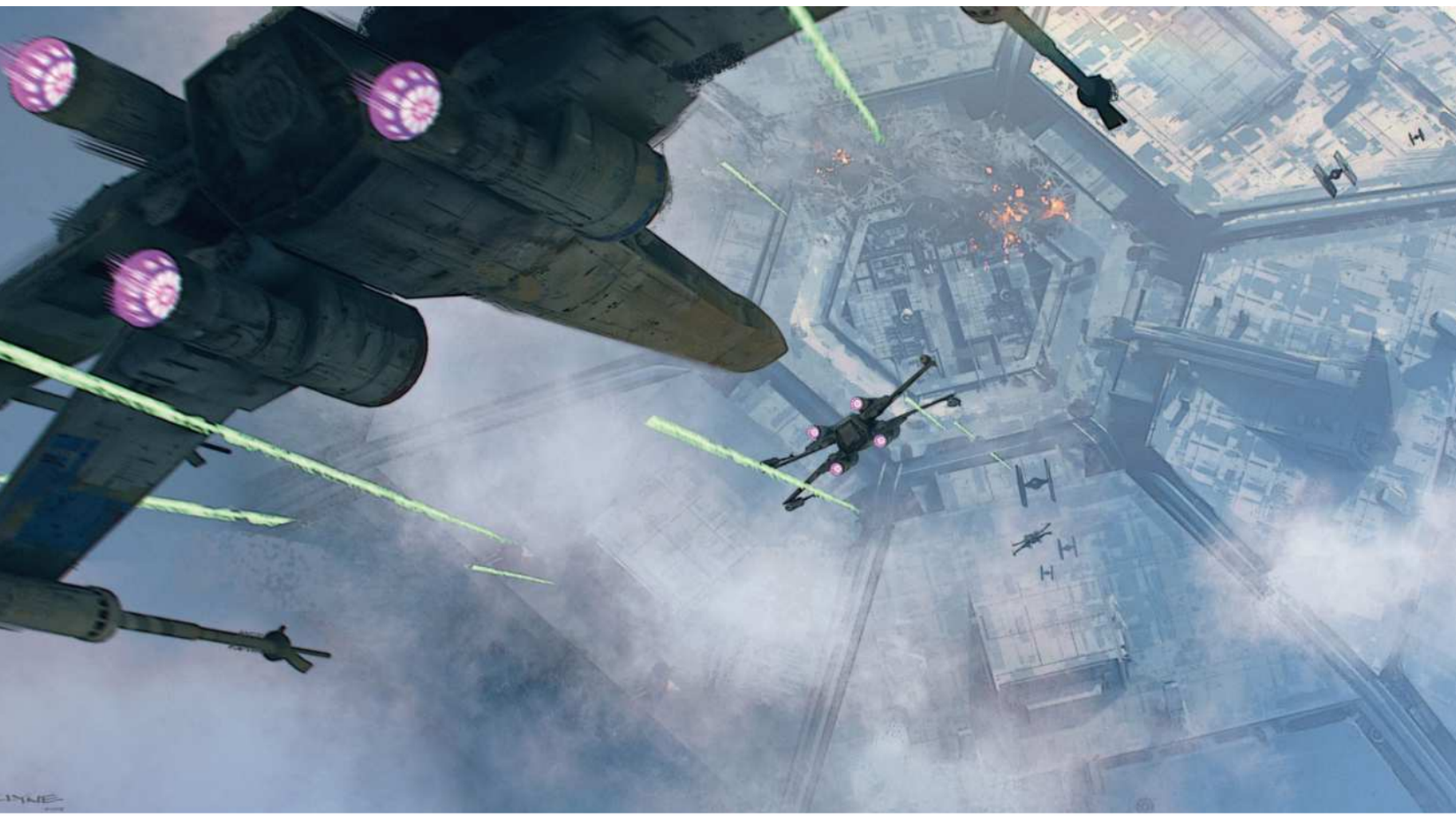
"Episode IV made such an impression. The hugeness of shapes. The colours."





THE ART OF STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS
A treasury of visualisations, concepts and production art, in chronological order.

LEFT A James Clyne concept based on a scene in the movie The Right Stuff, in which a "mermaid" in a fish tank flirts with one of the astronauts.



ABOVE James Clyne's visualisation for the "Bolt Attack" scene intentionally evokes classic Star Wars.

Church had worked on Episodes II and III, and knew that George Lucas was unhappy with the technical limitations of the time. "We pushed the boundaries of what was possible with digital and often broke those boundaries," he reveals. "Because ILM was involved early on The Force Awakens, we were able to design with J.J. [Abrams] how to get the most convincing and real looking stuff even if it would be digital. That's the secret sauce of ILM's approach."

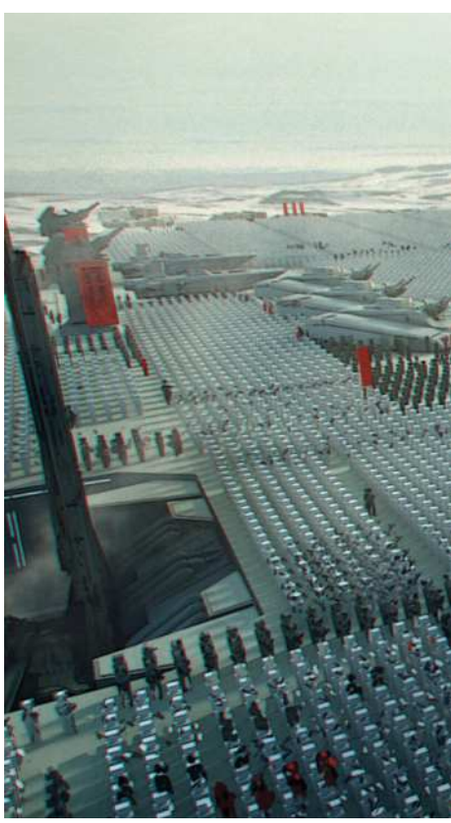
BUILDING A WORLD

"The earlier the director can see things to a high degree of finish, the better for making decisions," explains Church. "We'd show J.J. what kind of shots he could get with a limited set build versus what he'd get with a larger set build. We spent many months with each vehicle and location exploring the limits of what a Star Wars look is."

Using Photoshop, Modo, Poser and SketchUp, ILM supervising art director James Clyne worked on the First Order – the Star Destroyer, the Starkiller Base, the troop transport – from the macro level right down to what a switch looks like on a console. "There's a console in The Force Awakens that looks like an outdoor barbecue. Han Solo has to punch a number on it," Clyne reveals. "I built that in 2D and 3D. The 3D outdoor barbecue object went to the art department and it was built as a physical object. Using 3D allows us to have more influence. We can say, 'This is the object.' We can hand it over and see it through."

Other objects had simpler origins. "The First Order troop transport I designed was one of the first original ships approved by J.J.," Clyne says. "Star Wars always relates back in history to World War II or Vietnam."

Art director Kevin Jenkins confirms the military history connection: for the troop carrier, he reveals, "Basically, I took a picture of a Chinook, a troop transport helicopter, and turned it on its side. Where the two helicopter engine bits go, I replaced one with a cockpit and the other with a gun. The troops come out of the middle."





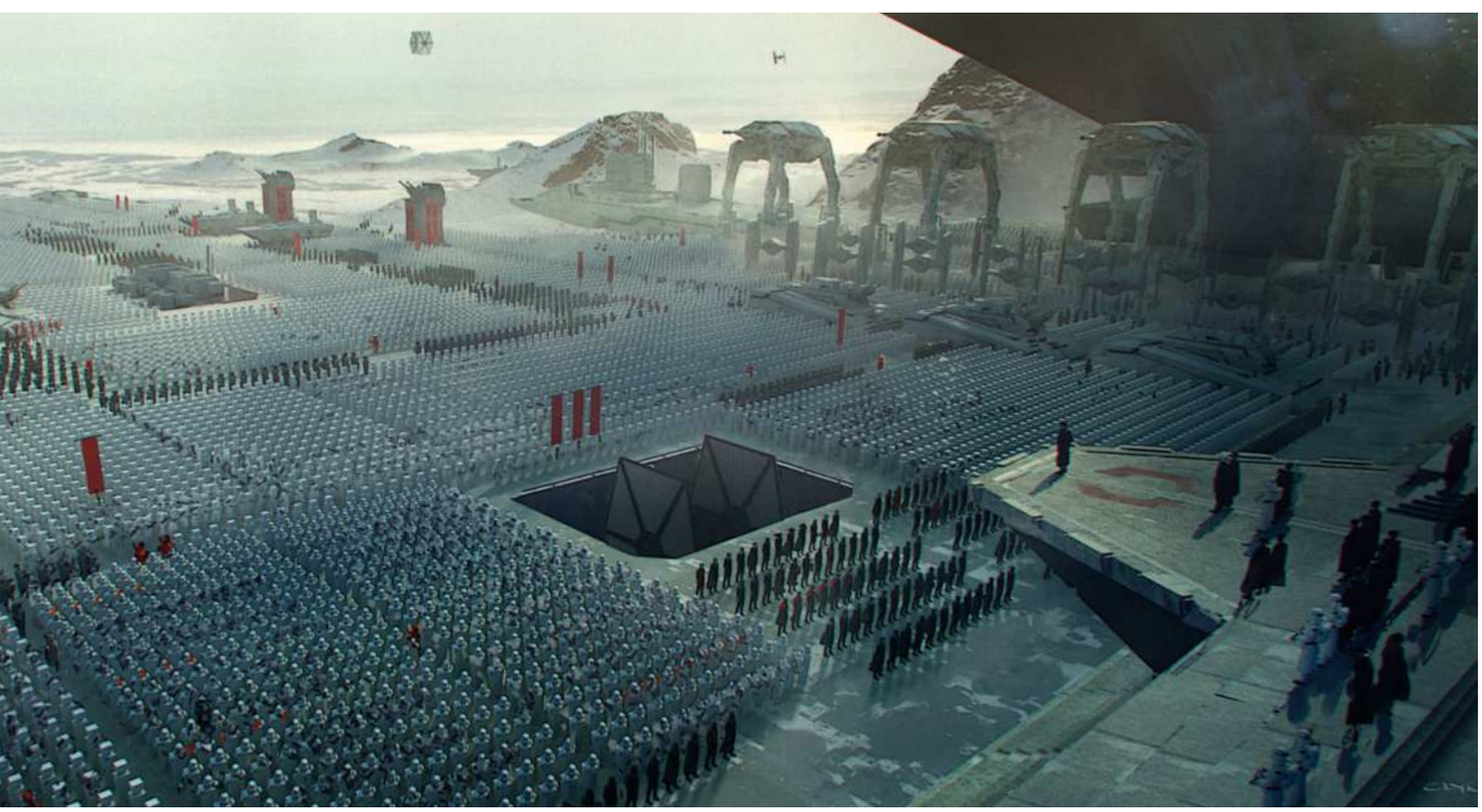
"We were able to design with J.J. how to get the most real looking stuff even if it would be digital. That's the secret sauce"

BELOW Preproduction painting of the Market by Art Director Kevin Jenkins. Many elements, such as BB-8's design, are settled.

BOTTOM James Clyne's Rally Site piece echoes the original films and also the Third Reich iconography they drew on in their turn.



The Art of Star Wars: The Force Awakens by Phil Szostak is published by Abrams Books. Images © and TM Lucasfilm Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Used with authorisation



SKETCHES

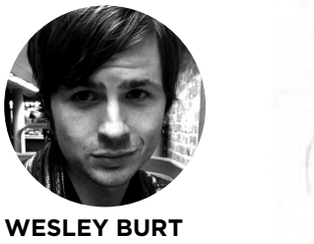
Where raw imagination takes fantastical shape.

WESLEY BURT

The Massive Black ace opens his Moleskine and reveals the thinking behind his striking visions

BATMAN
"I've always been a big Batman fan and one day at a coffee shop I started sketching out a loose idea I had in my head for a Batman cover. I wanted to make Robin a bit different, almost like a mutant."

FRENCH JAEGER PILOT
"I did this one after seeing Pacific Rim. I was just having fun drawing at a brunch place in town."





JUMBLE
"Sometimes I start working up drawings of forms and shapes in a more abstract manner, and then bring it all together through rendering and uniform lighting. It's a real mix of improvisation and retooling."



THUNDERCAT
"This started as a quick sketch of a musician, Thundercat, sort of taken into a sky pirate RPG idea. I took the original sketch a lot further for this drawing and worked up the whole body."

FLYING LOTUS
"As I was working on the Thundercat drawing, I had ideas for a compatriot of his, Flying Lotus."



"Sometimes I start working up drawings of forms and shapes in an abstract manner..."



ENTANGLEMENT
"I had this image in my head of a page filled with a sea of heads – not quite a crowd of people, but forms flowing in and out of each other a bit and lots of interesting features to drift around and look at."



DERVISH
"This image started fairly improvisational, but I found some interesting lines and shapes in the early sketch phase and then the idea really took hold."

HOMELESS
"This was done for a group art show about different neighbourhoods in San Francisco. It's an amalgamation of people and scenes I'd seen downtown and then remade through my imagination."

SOOTHSAYER
"This page started out as some random sketches and doodles, but quickly became all tied together and I worked it up as a character for a world I've been envisioning."



"I found some interesting lines and shapes in the sketch phase and then the idea took hold"

INKHEADS

"I've been experimenting a lot with these Mangaka flexible pens and markers. They have a great marker tip and really nice ink for my Moleskine pages."

LUCHADORES

"There's a storefront in the Mission district in San Francisco that has a huge wall of luchadore masks for sale. I was always interested in the way it looked, and thought it would make for a great sketch."



RAPHAEL LACOSTE

Famed for his grand, immersive settings, the artist says he likes to be inspired by reality but then go further

FANTASY

"Compositions I drew during my son's Saturday Circus Class (Cirque du Soleil School). I had to wait two hours for the end of his lessons, so I started to bring my sketchbook along. I prefer to sketch on paper rather than digitally – I find that my gestures are more direct and spontaneous."



MONTREAL

"A study of the Plateau Montoyal District, next to my house."



FRANCE AND HOUSE OF AUGUST

"These are studies based on references I found on the internet, but I stretched the compositions to make them look more stylised and interesting. I like to be inspired by real visuals and try to push the composition to the next level."



"I like to be inspired by the real and push the composition to the next level"



RAPHAEL LACOSTE
Location: Canada

Raphael was art director on the first Assassin's Creed game and Prince of Persia while at Ubisoft Montreal, but then left to create art and concepts for blockbuster films such as Terminator Salvation and Jupiter Ascending. He's now at back at Ubisoft, as brand art director on the Assassin's Creed franchise.
http://ifxm.ag/rlacoste





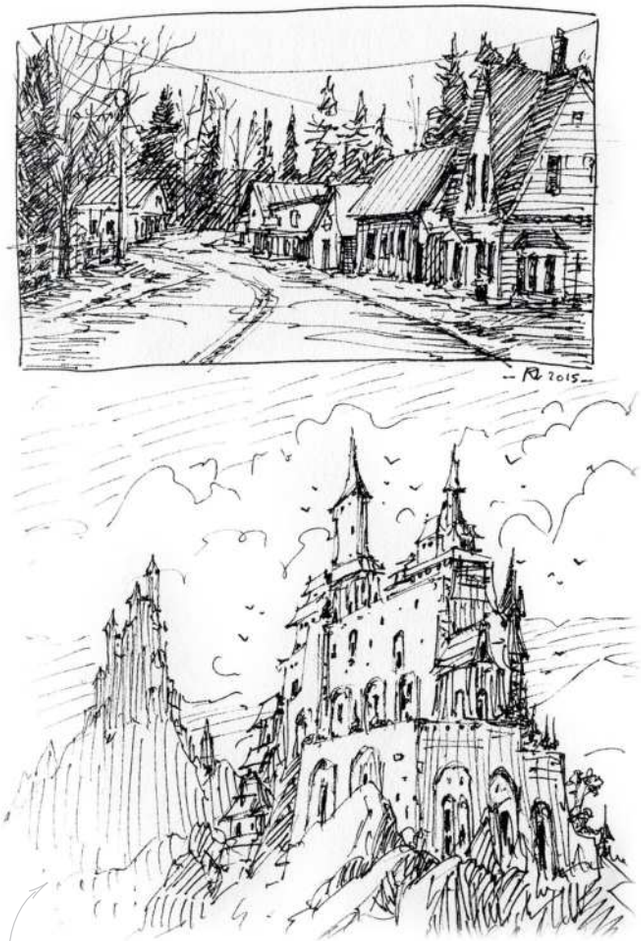
CASTLE FORT

"Concept sketch for the illustration 'In the Mood for Knights', (see the final piece at http://www.raphael-lacoste.com/projects/OEO38). I painted it live for my students at the NAD Center school for my Environment Design class."



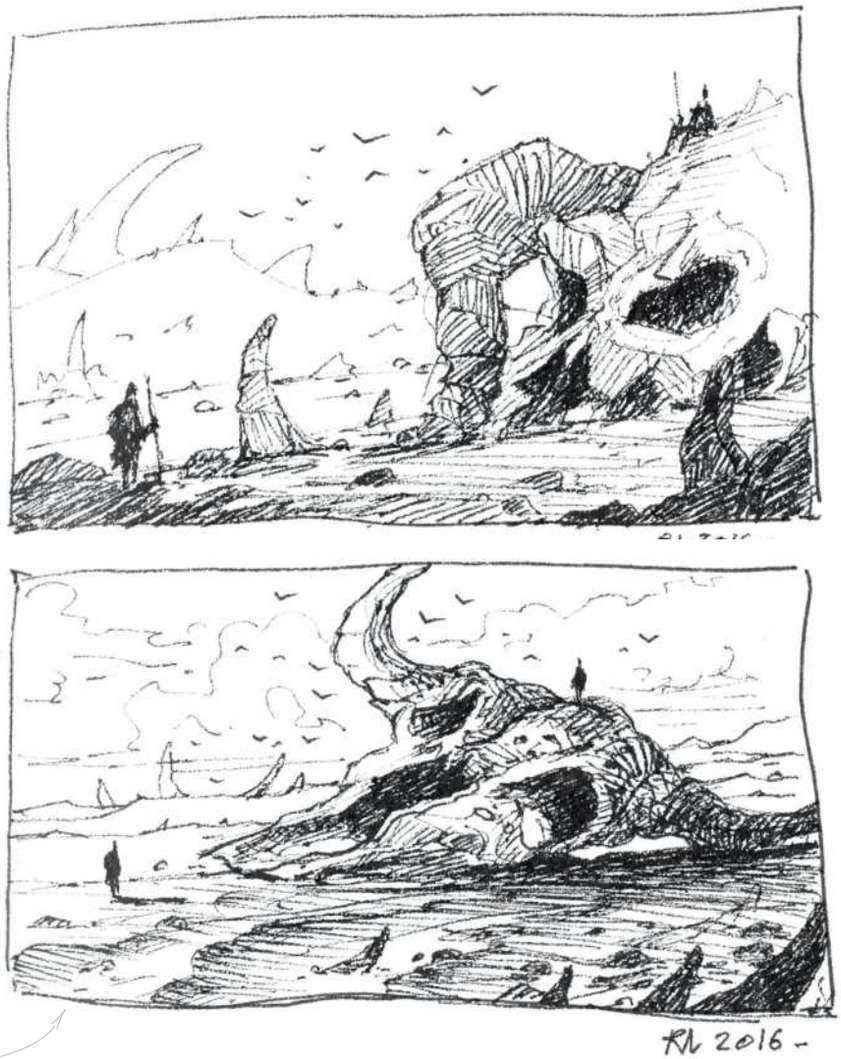
VENICE

"Based on a trip to Venice one summer with my girlfriend. It was an amazing week! I did this study based on a photo I took one evening. I didn't want to be literal, so I went with a more cartoony style. I wanted to be inspired by reality but to make a more stylised illustration."



VILLAGE AND CASTLE

"Exploration and study. At the top, a village in Vermont next to a place we rented during winter. This place was really spooky – very 'Fallout'! The other thumbnail is from imagination, an exploration for a fantasy illustration."



SKULL LAND

"Studies for an ongoing personal project. You can see one final illustration, 'Fallen Titans', on my Artstation page: http://ifxm.ag/lacoste-titans"

"I didn't want to be literal, but to make a more stylised piece"

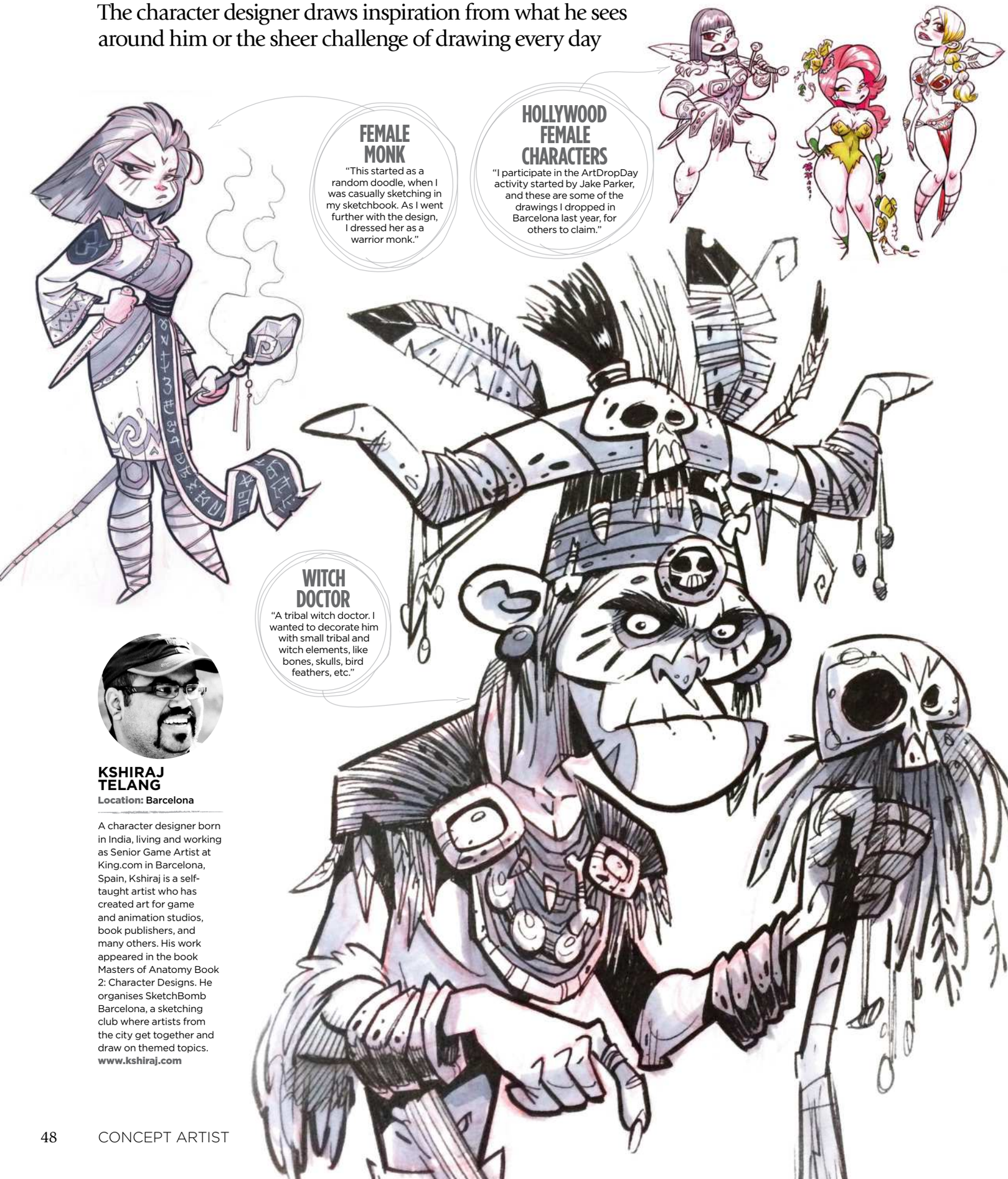


MOOD CITY

"Composition and atmospheric depth study. I did this one during a class for my students at NAD Center – the school offers a degree course in Videogame and Film, for which I teach Environment Design."

KSHIRAJ TELANG

The character designer draws inspiration from what he sees around him or the sheer challenge of drawing every day



FEMALE MONK

"This started as a random doodle, when I was casually sketching in my sketchbook. As I went further with the design, I dressed her as a warrior monk."

HOLLYWOOD FEMALE CHARACTERS

"I participate in the ArtDropDay activity started by Jake Parker, and these are some of the drawings I dropped in Barcelona last year, for others to claim."

WITCH DOCTOR

"A tribal witch doctor. I wanted to decorate him with small tribal and witch elements, like bones, skulls, bird feathers, etc."

KSHIRAJ TELANG

Location: Barcelona

A character designer born in India, living and working as Senior Game Artist at King.com in Barcelona, Spain, Kshiraj is a self-taught artist who has created art for game and animation studios, book publishers, and many others. His work appeared in the book Masters of Anatomy Book 2: Character Designs. He organises SketchBomb Barcelona, a sketching club where artists from the city get together and draw on themed topics.
www.kshiraj.com



DRAGON

"Another SketchBomb sketch, and the theme here was to draw a dragon. It was INKtober month, and I had great fun doing some ink drawings on paper."

INDIAN WEDDING BAND

"In India, it's a tradition to hire a wedding band that plays music during the ceremony. They are dressed in heavily decorated costume, which was my inspiration in this sketch."



DRAW OR DIE

"To develop a habit of drawing every day, I created a self-motivational challenge named 'DRAWorDIE', where the idea was to do at least one drawing a day. Here's an Indian Sadhu done during that challenge."

"I'm developing the habit of sketching people I see on my way to work with an ordinary ballpoint"



"To develop a habit of drawing every day, I created a self-motivational challenge named 'Draw or Die'"

OUTLAW BIKER
"This was a SketchBomb sketch, where the theme was to draw an Outlaw Biker. Simple as that!"

KING
"Another sketch from the INKtober month."









RAVANA
"The primary antagonist in the Hindu epic Ramayana, he is depicted as the ruler of Lanka, and was later killed by Lord Rama."

PIN-UP GIRL LIFE DRAWING
"1-3-5 minutes sketches from a life drawing event in Barcelona with a pin-up cosplayer model."



ORC
"A drawing I did to try out some new coloured pencils I bought. Made an orc! They're always fun, and a great subject to draw."

STUDIO PROFILES

When we talk of a studio, the term might mean a group of people or a physical space – or indeed the potent combination of the two that as if by some alchemy gives the best creative collectives a distinctive ethos and identity. In the profiles that follow, we'll explore some of the leading studios in the industry today and meet the people behind many of the best-known brands in modern games and entertainment, from Star Wars to Candy Crush Saga and from World of Warcraft to LittleBigPlanet. Then some established artists will invite us into their workspaces to see how they work as well as where.

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With only a little fanfare but with great pride, the award-winning visual effects studio

Industrial Light & Magic

has expanded its San Francisco art department into a global team. The newly enlarged department now boasts 35 artists working in ILM's San Francisco, Singapore, Vancouver and London studios.

STUDIO DETAILS

Location: San Francisco (plus offices in London, Singapore and Vancouver)



Recent projects:
The Revenant, Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens, Jurassic World
Other projects:
Rango, Transformers, Star Trek Into Darkness, Pirates of the Caribbean, Avengers, Iron Man
Web: www.ilm.com

© Map: iStock.com/Alex Belomlinsky



A spectacular visualisation for Star Wars Episode III by Ryan Church.

All images courtesy Industrial Light & Magic

Twenty-six of the 35 artists sketch, model and paint at ILM San Francisco, while two stretch their skills in each of the Vancouver and Singapore studios, and five now work in ILM's new London studio.

"We were fortunate to have Kevin Jenkins and his crew decide to join us in London," says ILM creative director David Nakabayashi. "Kevin's background and industry connections immediately strengthened our position over there."

Forty years ago, the art department's role was to support ILM's visual effects work on Star Wars. That's still part of the job today, with artists helping create the $2 billion box-office hit Star Wars: The Force Awakens. In 2015 they also contributed to two more blockbusters, Jurassic World and Avengers: Age of Ultron.

"We used to draw with pencils and markers, mess around with models and build miniature versions of principal designs," says David Nakabayashi, who himself recently celebrated his 20th year at ILM. "George [Lucas] always kept an art department near him to create the designs. In fact, a lot of the ideas in those early Star Wars came from ILM, not production design. That's why ILM's art department became so important to films after Star Wars. Directors came to ILM to help them visualise the movies."

Today's global art department has continued that tradition and pushed it forward. Senior art director Ryan Church worked at ILM and at Lucasfilm during the Star Wars prequels, left to work in Los Angeles, and recently returned to ILM. He received a VES nomination for art direction on Episode II, and while in LA received four nominations for production design from the Art Directors Guild, winning for Avatar.

THE ART DEPARTMENT



DAVID NAKABAYASHI
CREATIVE DIRECTOR



AARON McBRIDE
ART DIRECTOR



JAMES CLYNE
ART DIRECTOR



JENNIFER CORONADO
GLOBAL ART DEPARTMENT MANAGER



ALEX JAEGER
SENIOR VISUAL EFFECTS ART DIRECTOR



RYAN CHURCH
CONCEPT ARTIST



David Nakabayashi

ILM's creative director on the role and value of artists

Why is an art department a necessary part of the visual effects team?
Because of the artistic eye and sensibility. In dailies I hear a lot of back and forth about making a shot better. It's good to get an aesthetic voice in the group, people who bring strong emotion to the shots, who think the way a painter thinks about colour and light.

How do the artists in ILM's global art department support the visual effects supervisors in post-production of films?
They initially do reference, then as shots move through, they continue to look for reference for things that might come up. They might paint over a frame that isn't working, give ideas for lighting, colour, how water moves. They can help make things look real. Artists can create emotion and texture, and bring that into shot work. You'd perhaps be surprised how much concept art looks photoreal. Sometimes simple models created in concept art make it into final shots.

When you're hiring concept artists and designers, what is it you are looking for?
I look for their spark. Of course their skills, their craftsmanship, too. But I need to know they can produce an image out of nothing that has emotion and personality. They can be young, but if there is a subtlety in their work, personality in a character, scale and feeling in a landscape, those people will interest us. And, we want artists who are fixed on what we do here: we create characters and worlds for films.



ABOVE ILM's biggest challenge on Tomorrowland was creating a city that functioned in three time periods: 1964, 1984, and 2014. Image by Ryan Church.

BELOW LEFT Another of Ryan Church's concepts for Star Wars Episode III. He's also worked on Avatar and Steven Spielberg's War of the Worlds.

"At the time of the prequels, ILM's art department was more about doing shots," says Ryan. "But, when I was working with Rick Carter on Tomorrowland, I came up to ILM and saw a completely different studio. The artists were working with directors earlier and earlier. I thought it was time to get back to ILM."

Ryan rejoined ILM a few years ago. He spent a solid year helping design ships and environments for The Force Awakens, then continued working on that film on and off while moving on to the next films.

"I did a ton of stuff," he says of his time spent on the new Star Wars film. "A lot of the third-act ice planet, the new X-Wing, which is obviously based on Ralph McQuarrie's design, Kylo Ren's ship, the planet Jakku, interiors and exteriors. There were entire planets designed and discarded for that movie."



EVOLUTION OF A STUDIO

Ryan's work on The Force Awakens typifies much of what the artists in ILM's global art department do, but they do far more than contribute visual effects to films. During the past year, ILM artists have handled 50 projects, and of those only 16 were related to ILM's films. "Increasingly we're servicing clients as an art department outside post-production," says Jennifer Coronado, who does project management, talent development and client engagement at ILM. "We're at the head of the process. We might have an art director on a show for a year, but we also have concept artists who float between bid work, client pitches and character development. Sometimes our art department is an extension of the production designer's art department. And we also do graphic design, marketing design, design for AR and VR, character design for games, crew photos and posters, and product design."

Product design? "We're working with a company that uses 3D printing to build Star Wars prosthetics for kids," explains Jennifer. "They wanted to make cool things for kids to wear. So senior visual effects art



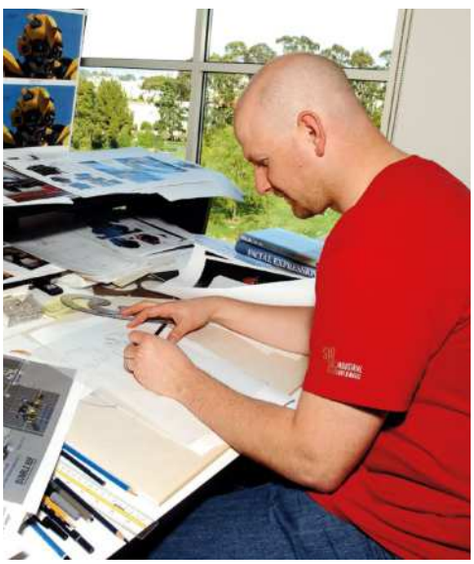
director Alex Jaeger designed some."

Alex joined ILM straight out of college in 1995 and could be regarded as something of a poster child for how to become an art director at ILM. He was on track to become a car designer until an elective class, creative writing, sent him in a new direction. He wrote a science fiction story and started designing sci-fi vehicles instead of cars.

"There were entire planets designed and discarded for The Force Awakens"

Unsurprisingly, the transportation department wasn't amused. It took him a year to get off probation.

After a trip to California with his dad that included a visit to ILM, he switched to the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and geared all his classes towards landing a job at ILM. It worked. Within weeks of graduating, he was building miniature jungle trees for Congo in ILM's model shop. At the same time, he did concept art and storyboards for the art department. And then one day John Knoll asked Jaeger if he wanted to

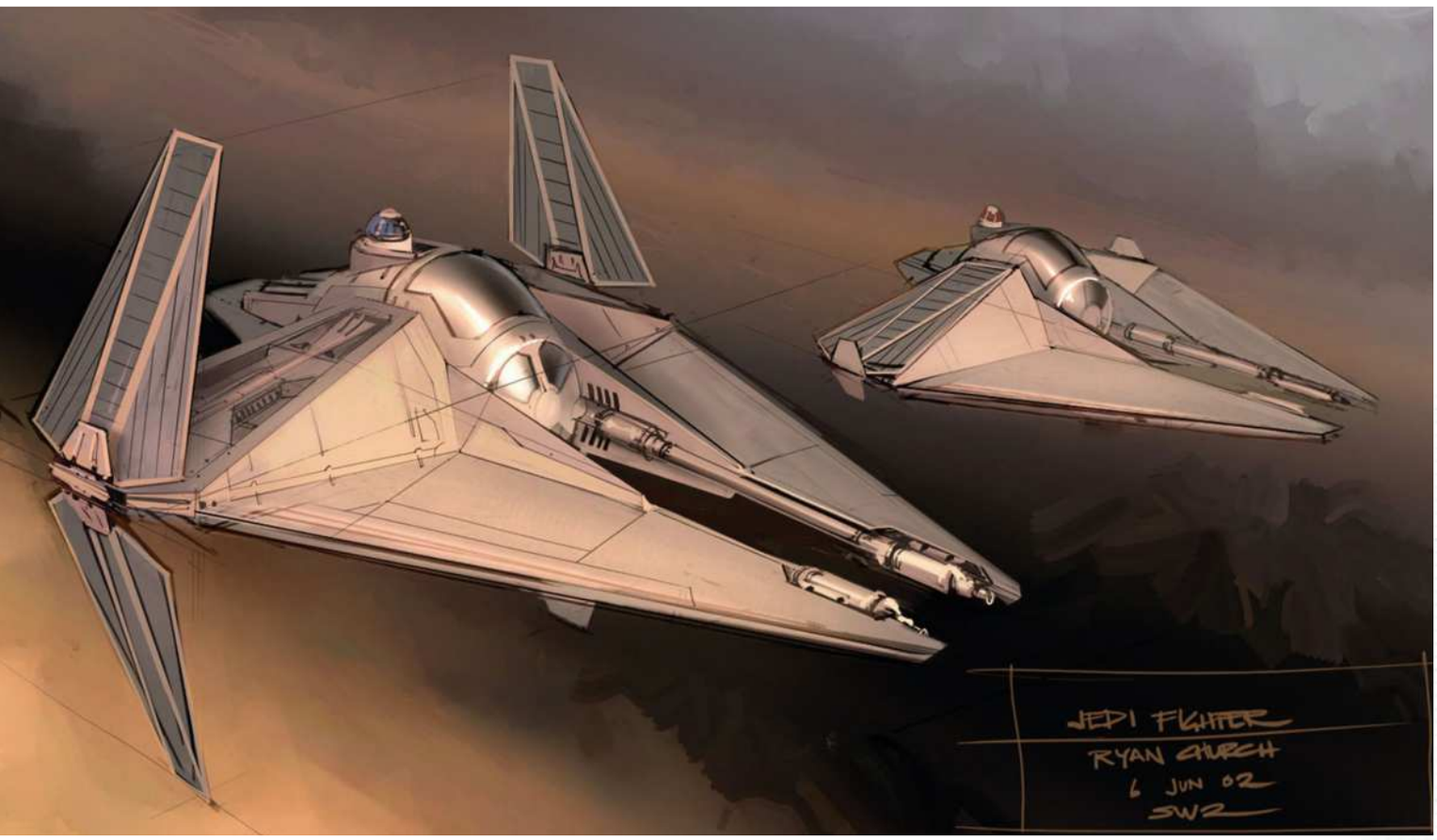


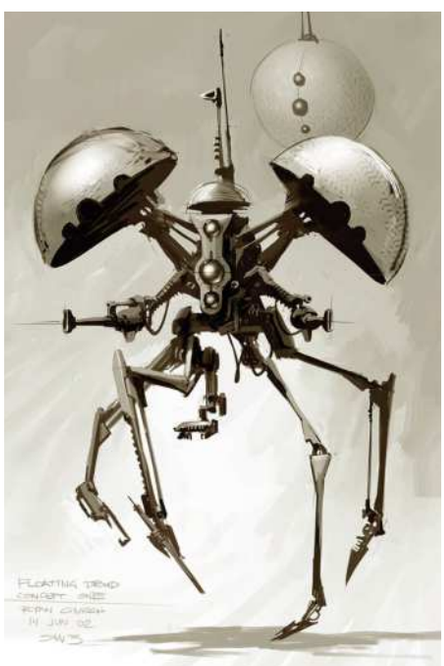
ABOVE James Clyne brainstormed with Rick Carter and a group of six other artists to imagine what Star Wars would look like 30 years after Return of the Jedi.

LEFT Alex Jaeger hard at work on his Transformer designs. He originally trained to be a car designer, which came in very useful.

BELOW Concept art by Ryan Church for Episode III. Every scene is explored to a high degree of finish to help the director make design decisions.



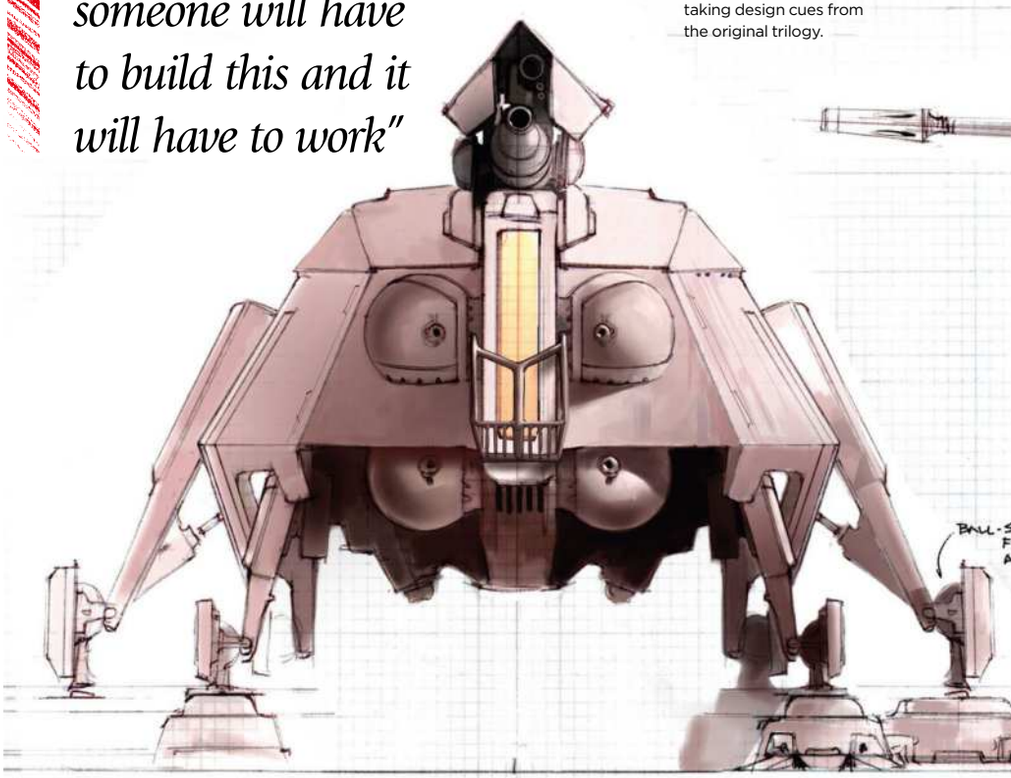


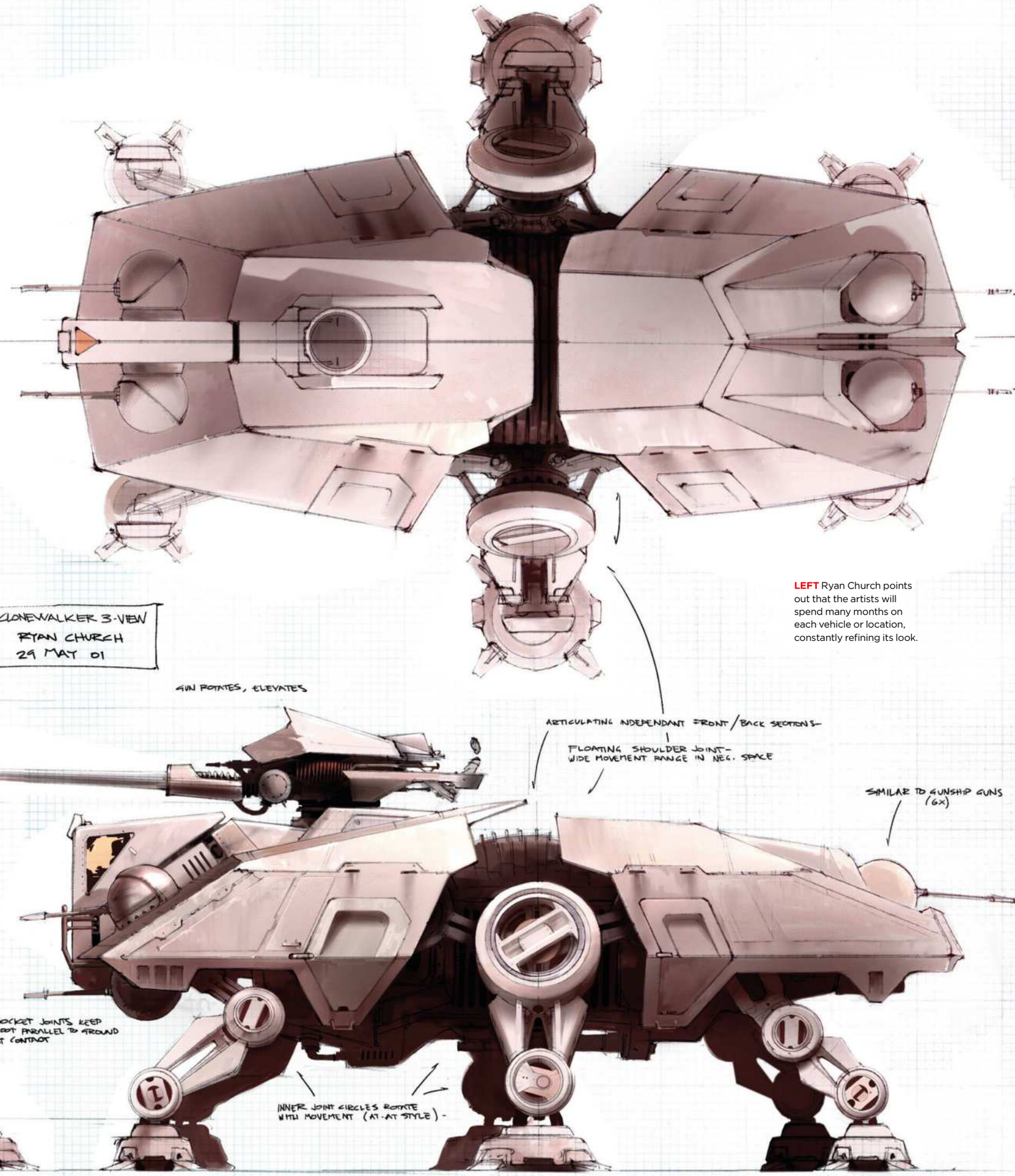


ABOVE For the prequels, everything had to echo the established design language but with room for elements that had never been seen before.

"I have the idea that someone will have to build this and it will have to work"

ABOVE Early concept sketches for Star Wars Episode II, deliberately taking design cues from the original trilogy.





LEFT Ryan Church points out that the artists will spend many months on each vehicle or location, constantly refining its look.





"We start with bid presentations for whatever is in the script – creatures, ships, environments"

ABOVE Aaron McBride's early concept work for Iron Man shows Tony Stark preparing to suit up.

RIGHT Aaron McBride referenced photos of turkey jerky to create the decomposing look of the half-human, half sea-creatures for Pirates of the Caribbean.



LEFT For Tomorrowland ILM was asked to design and build a complete virtual city, with "1950s optimism", which should "feel like the perfect blend between art and science".

art direct Star Trek: First Contact. Jaeger was 23 years old.

Of course, he said yes. "Then I thought, 'What does an art director do?'" says Alex. "It was trial by fire. I had jumped a lot of steps and some people thought I would fail. But I did a good job and I've been an art director year after year since then."

DREAM JOB

In all, Jaeger has been a visual effects art director on 20 films and a concept artist on nearly 20 more, including three Transformers films, Star Wars Episodes II and III, Mission Impossible, Captain America: The Winter Soldier, Tomorrowland, and Avengers: Age of Ultron. He has received three VES nominations, including one with Ryan Church for Star Wars Episode II, and one for Transformers. His particular forte is hard-surface models, and he loves building them so much that he's created a website for a fake German company, Jaegerwerks, that builds models designed by "JaegerTech".

"A lot of times artists don't think about whether the models can work," he says. "But I do. Even with the Transformers. I wanted to be able to take this and make it into that. That's why I think the Transformers in the first film were so successful. We took the time to use car parts. Because I worked in the model shop, I have the idea that someone will have to build this and it will have to work."

OPENING DOORS

About three years after Alex started at ILM, and at the same time he and Ryan were working on the Star Wars prequels, senior art director Aaron McBride found his way to ILM. After graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design, he started working at MSNBC, but taking figure-drawing workshops. During one of these, he met a man whose son was the art director on Saving Private Ryan. And doors opened.

Aaron started as a production assistant in ILM's art department. He moved up when David Nakabayashi put him on the team for AI. Then John Knoll asked if he wanted to art direct Pirates of the Caribbean. "I was working in Photoshop, a program John Knoll helped create," Aaron says. "He wasn't involved at that time, but it was still daunting."

From there, Aaron continued as digital effects art director on the subsequent Pirates films. He was the creature art director for



LEFT Christian Alzmann's art for Rango, ILM's first full-length feature animated film. It won an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature.



Jennifer Coronado

ILM's global art department manager talks legacy

Why does ILM have a global art department?
The art department is always operating in pants-on-fire mode. We can't forecast when we might get a call from a director, so we have to be flexible. A director might need four artists on a show right now. Four studios in four countries gives us more reach to find resources.

Are the artists all on a pipeline?
We're pipeline oriented in visual effects, so if you start building something in the pipeline, you can go back 50 iterations. But we keep the artists slightly separate. We don't want them bogged down in shots. They need to get to the target fast by doing concepts quickly. Even when they work in 3D, it's very kitbashing. Some artists use Maya, some 3ds Max, ZBrush, Poser, SketchUp, Photoshop. The image is what's important. It's usually a hybrid of 3D and 2D.

Do they collaborate across studios?
Everyone is hands on. We always partner an art director with a concept artist, and art directors work with and mentor people in different studios. There are time zone issues, but it's important everyone feels part of a team. We do weekly calls and updates, and monthly reviews with Dennis Muren. He has a great eye for cinema. He knows how to create a focal point for a frame. If you aren't doing that, you're failing. I don't want artists to forget what came before, to lose people's wisdom. We're all here because George Lucas had an idea.



ABOVE ILM brought the main characters and environments to life in TMNT – this image is by Christian Alzmann.

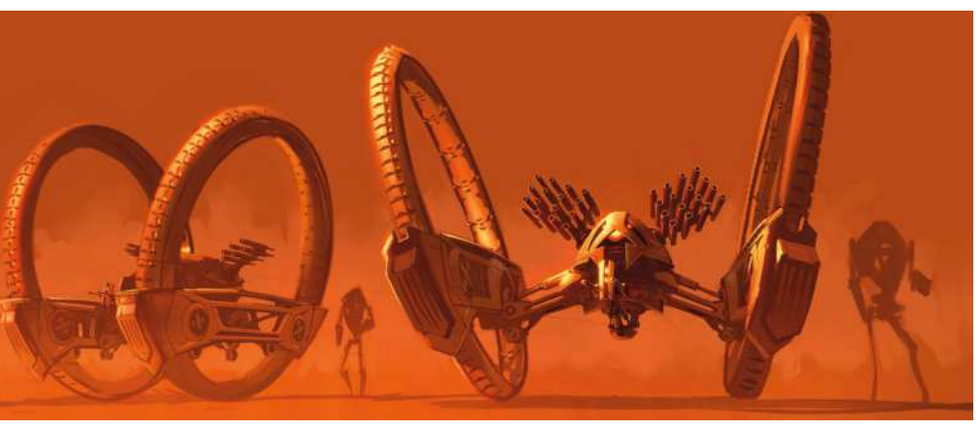
BELOW Ryan Church's innovative designs for Attack of the Clones included the deadly Hailfire droids.

Rango, designed the suit-up machine for Iron Man, then the giant leviathan creature that Hulk fights in Avengers, and more recently was senior art director on Noah, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Jurassic World. He has two VES nominations, for Iron Man and Iron Man 2. On his own, he's creating a graphic novel called Toraidhe.

PREPREPRODUCTION

McBride typically becomes involved in film projects early in preproduction, but sometimes even before that, with requests from directors and studios leading to pitches for films. "They want artwork that will serve as a foothold to move forward with the look of a project, even if it won't be executed in visual effects," says Aaron. "We usually start by doing bid presentations for whatever is outlined in the script – creatures, ships, environments. Then we work with the production designer and director to flesh things out."

For example, supervising art director James Clyne, who joined ILM in 2013, was involved with early planning for Star Wars: The Force Awakens. "We started as a group of seven artists to brainstorm what our world of Star Wars would look like 30 years after Return of the Jedi," says James. "Then director J.J. Abrams came on board, the script came together, and we all went to Pinewood. Since my background is mostly working in the art department close to set,



"To work on Star Wars is not a dream come true, it's a dream I never thought possible"



ABOVE Rey's house by James Clyne – basing it around an old AT-AT helps ground the movie in the familiar "used universe".

RIGHT Aaron McBride borrowed books on diseases from his sister, a doctor, to inspire ideas for Pirates of the Caribbean.





it was a great opportunity for me to be a liaison in London."

Before joining ILM, James had been a freelance concept artist in Los Angeles for 16 years. Like Alex, he had become a concept artist and art director after studying industrial design. "I went to the Art Center in Pasadena to study automotive design," he says. "Halfway through I realised I didn't want to design tail-light housings for the rest of my life." An instructor referred him to Rhythm & Hues, and his career in entertainment began. "The first thing I did was a dung beetle for a show at Disneyland based on A Bug's Life," he says. "It was crazy getting paid to design a dung ball."

THE ART AWAKENS

That led to work on feature films and, eventually, to joining the Art Directors Guild, which meant directors, producers, and production designers working on big blockbuster films would hire him. He has received four nominations from the Guild, and, along with Ryan, won an Excellence in Production Design for Avatar. Star Wars: The Force Awakens marks the 30th film for which he has been a concept artist, illustrator, or designer.

For the new Star Wars film, James worked on the First Order – the troop transport, the Star Destroyer, the Starkiller Base. "Star Wars always relates back in history to World War II or Vietnam," he explains. "So I made a PT boat and put spaceship parts on it. That went to ILM to start building as a 3D digital asset, and to the art department in London, who built a full-size model of half the ship. Having the ability to develop that idea in 3D made the process that much easier, but the idea, the spark came from an old idea. From the '40s."

Clyne is now working on Star Wars Episode VII. "I saw Star Wars when I was eight," he says. "To work on Star Wars is not a dream come true, it's a dream I never thought was possible. To be part of this new Star Wars launch is amazing."

The first Star Wars prompted George Lucas to open a visual effects studio and make the art department an integral part of visual effects, turning artists Joe Johnston and Ralph McQuarrie into legends. Now ILM is cultivating a new generation of artists, many inspired by Johnston and McQuarrie, in studios across the world – artists who are likely to become a new generation's legends in their turn.

HIGH FIVE

We profile five of the best videogame studios to work for today as an artist

One of the most exciting sectors of all for concept artists and illustrators is videogames. While the stereotype of big publishers churning out annual updates, forcing artists to specialise in such prosaic things as benches or roof tiles, is true for some of the industry, in fact games companies are typically nurturing, fun places that celebrate artists' individual styles and ideas. Here we'll give you a taste of what it's like to be part of the top companies today, speak to the heads of art teams and also chat with new starters to find out why it's, quite frankly, just really cool to make games.





ABOVE Media Molecule's Dreams builds on the creative gameplay of earlier game LittleBigPlanet and lets players sculpt.

TOP RIGHT Tearaway's visuals are inspired by papercraft, and everything in the game's world is made from paper.

Media Molecule

Groundbreaking, Sony-owned studio with sacks of personality

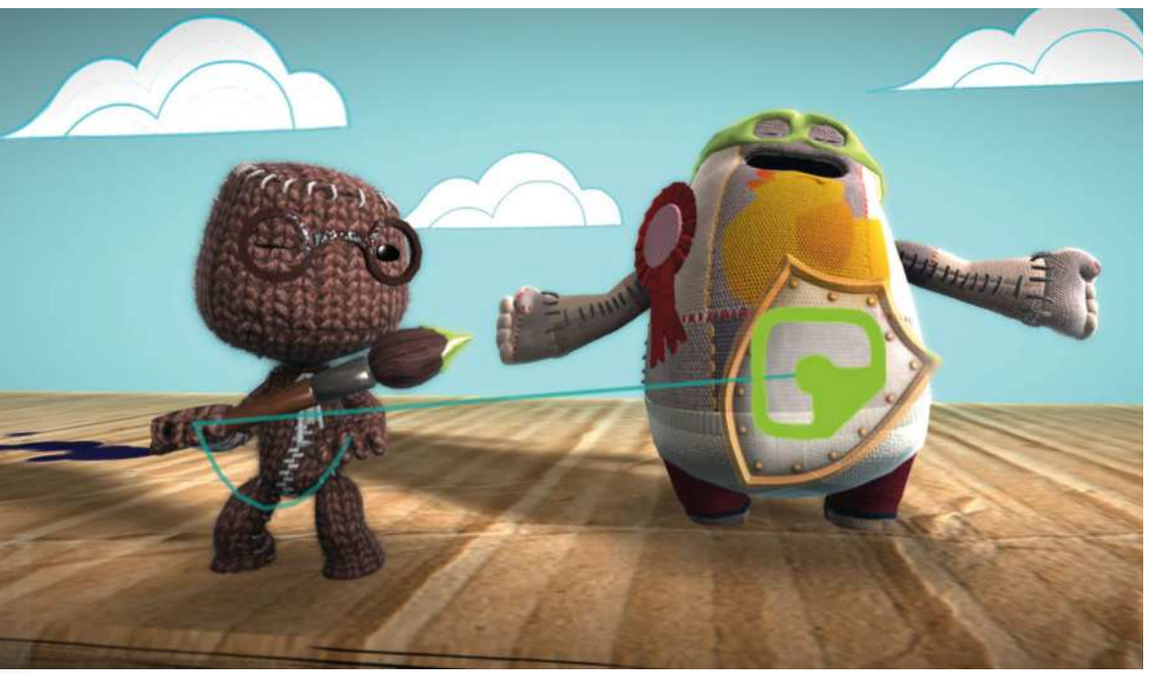
In the absence of mascots to follow in the footsteps of Sonic and Mario, Media Molecule set loose the charming Sackboy as the face of its PlayStation game LittleBigPlanet.

It's a studio in love with craft aesthetics – found objects, torn graph paper, frayed cloth – and this is reflected in the visuals of games like LittleBigPlanet and the beautiful Tearaway. And fittingly for a firm with such



RIGHT In early demos Dreams has a distinctive, painterly art style that showcase brushstrokes as if you were somehow inside the work of one of the old masters.

BELOW LittleBigPlanet's endearing hessian heroes cut distinctive figures among the theatrically-inspired backdrops against which they hare about – usually foolishly.





Maja-Lisa Kehlet Hansen
Artist

What's it like working at Media Molecule?
It's a place where people treat you as an equal and welcome you as family. Your opinion is valued, your art is respected, and development and style exploration are highly encouraged.

How much artistic freedom do you get?
A lot. I'm encouraged to do whatever I'm most passionate about, and it's even important to my art director that my personal style shines through in the project. This makes me feel valued as well as motivated to become a better artist.

How did you find joining the company?
I instantly felt included. It has also been very helpful with the practical aspects of moving from Denmark and has even made sure to check on me regularly to see how I am doing.

a creative outlook, it involves staff in most aspects of development.

"Our team is quite a small, multi-disciplinary bunch, and our game-making tools try to make people more holistic and less specialised," says art director Kareem Ettouney. "So my view is that everyone in Media Molecule is an artist/designer/game maker. By the traditional breakdowns we have about nine artists, seven designers, four graphics engine programmers and two graphics UI programmer/designers. But [everyone at the studio] is involved."

Ettouney explains that the studio is committed to nurturing individuality and helping artists achieve as much as possible through unique tools and engines that encourage expression – which you can try first-hand in the LittleBigPlanet series' wonderful level editing tools. The studio seeks inspiration from the world outside of video games as well as from within, and hence even offers a yearly fund for staff to develop themselves in a direction of their choice, be it learning a language, taking up a new sport or even getting singing lessons. And this progressive approach fosters a uniquely symbiotic working environment.

"People in the art department are thinking not just about their own things, but the overall results and how we can lift a game up to a level that satisfies all of us," explains artist Maja-Lisa Kehlet Hansen. "We also have a say in what should be made technically in the game. There's a fine line between the art department and the super technical programmers, coders, etc. We're both very good at listening to one another's needs and finding out exactly what is it that we're missing in the game."

STUDIO DETAILS

Location: UK



Team number:
Unspecified
Art department number:
Nine
AD's greatest artistic achievement: "Our games and our tools."
Projects
LittleBigPlanet,
LittleBigPlanet 2,
Tearaway,
Tearaway Unfolded,
Dreams (in development)
www.mediamolecule.com



ABOVE In a brilliant move, Tearaway's charming creatures and characters can be printed onto card.

© Map: iStock.com/Alex Belomlinsky



LEFT WoW's Mists Of Pandaria expansion is set on a giant turtle back island – the eastern-themed architecture references this geographical quirk.



Blizzard Entertainment

The long-established studio behind World Of Warcraft and Hearthstone is in a world of its own

Even to those who are not regular game players, Blizzard is well known for the paradigm shifting massively multiplayer online RPG World Of Warcraft and card battler Hearthstone.

Players can build their decks from a ever-growing pool of hundreds of illustrated cards, and the art team in charge of it all consists of nine individuals, who between them cover concept art, 3D art, tech art, FX art and external art management.



STUDIO DETAILS

Location: US



Team number: 50 (Hearthstone)
Art department number: Nine
AD's greatest artistic achievement: "Re-imagining the Warcraft brand in consistently new, charming and surprising ways"
Projects
World of Warcraft, Diablo III, StarCraft II, Heroes of the Storm, Hearthstone, Overwatch.
www.blizzard.com

LEFT Every location in WoW and its expansions has its own look that draws from a mix of real world cultures and fantasy.

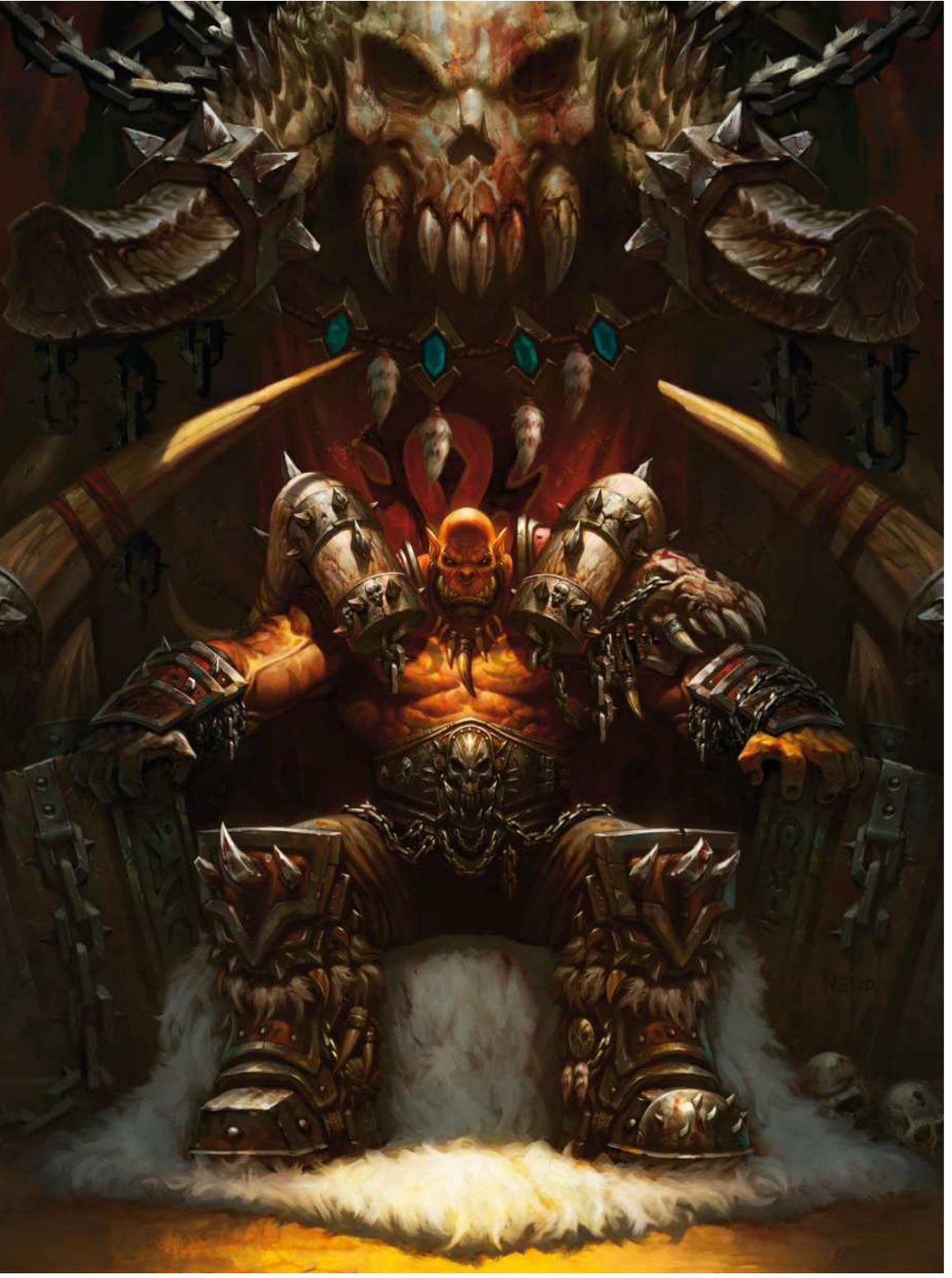
"The Hearthstone team as a whole was always intended to be made up of [people] who could wear multiple hats, allowing for maximum versatility and creativity," says art director Ben Thompson. "In the art team, we've continued this model by hiring two individuals for each of the roles, whose specialties complement one another. For instance, while we have two 3D artists, one of them has a very strong painting ability and the other more of a technical bent to their work. Structuring the team in this way allows us to share the workload more efficiently without sacrificing creativity."

To support this, Blizzard offers a range of learning opportunities for staff including life drawing sessions, training courses taught by Blizzard experts, and a curated program called /Learn which brings in external talent to help inspire new ideas.

Any additions to the team must of course be technically proficient, but that's not all. "One of the hardest-to-define characteristics to ascertain, but ultimately one of the most important, is the cultural fit with the rest of the team. Ultimately everyone is very close and works together incredibly well, and I'm proudest of our maintaining this hard-to-achieve relationship more than almost anything else," Thompson says.

ABOVE Hearthstone: Heroes Of Warcraft is a spin-off card battling game which uses creatures and lore from World Of Warcraft. The hundreds of cards require a huge team of artists.







ABOVE This charming looker is called Garrosh Hellscream, and is the ork leader of a multi-species army known as the Horde. Despite his portrait, he is best avoided.

LEFT This image will be used to illustrate World Of Warcraft's sixth expansion, Legion, which was released on 30 August 2016.



Jerry Mascho
Artist

What is it like to work at Blizzard?
Great! I grew up playing their games and living in their worlds, so being able to contribute to that is a really good feeling. The company culture is built around creativity and quality, which is evident in the process of making games here.

Do you get much artistic freedom in your work?
Quite a bit. Obviously we have a certain approach and things to keep in mind, but a lot of the artists' ideas end up in the game. With card backs and boards, as long as you can sell your idea and make something that benefits the game and excites players, it's fairly open. There's also a ton of content to be inspired from in the Warcraft lore, so there's never a shortage of ideas.

Did you find joining the company easy?
I've been here less than a year, but it feels like what I've always wanted in a job as a game developer. Our team moves fast, but everyone has a chance to contribute to the design of the game. Everyone is open to feedback and gives great critiques throughout the process. Blizzard definitely offers a lot of runway for artists to improve their abilities. Plus, being surrounded by people you look up to doesn't hurt either!

In your eyes, what makes the art department on your team special?
It's a small group, but really versatile. Everyone knows how to tackle so many different types of challenges, and they do so with a good sense of humour. That makes for a fun place to work with a chance to learn a ton of different things.



King Digital Entertainment Plc

The sweet-toothed social gaming company behind the huge hit Candy Crush Saga lives up to its label

King is a social games company focusing mainly on browser, mobile and Facebook games.

Best known for the phenomenal Candy Crush Saga, it's a huge studio with over 1,400 employees but handles development in smaller teams in order to harness an agile startup mentality in each project.

Internal project teams may be small, but this doesn't mean they can't interact. "All of our teams are hugely supportive here at King, and we're encouraged to help one another develop and improve our skill set by sharing knowledge and techniques that we've learnt along the way," reveals Aaron Allport, studio art director at King's London headquarters. "We pride ourselves on the quality of the work we produce and, as a result, expectations are often very high. We're continually looking for inspiration within the industry and strive to push our own craftsmanship in the games we make."

STUDIO DETAILS

Location: Ireland



Team number: 1,400
Art department number: Unspecified
AD's greatest artistic achievement: "Developing the art style for Farm Heroes Saga"
Projects
Candy Crush Saga, Diamond Digger, Farm Heroes, Bubble Witch 2.
www.king.com

Such expectations put raw talent at the fore of the things the studio looks for in new employees. "Of course, the fundamentals like colour, composition and render finish are important, but what we really look for is someone who is great at visual decision-making and visual problem-solving," says Allport. "This is key for any artist looking to get into the games industry. Crucially, we look for people who will add value to our art department and our whole company."

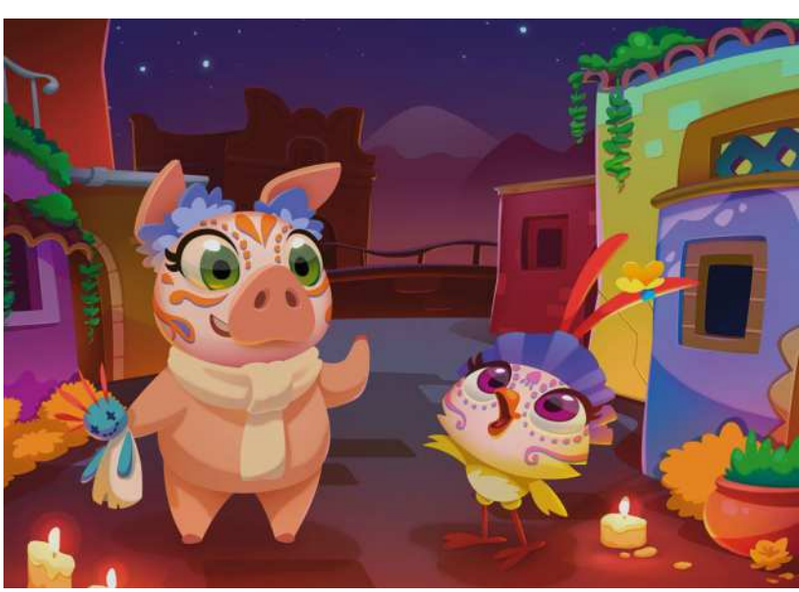
No matter how good you are, you can always get better. So King provides a wide range of training for its artists, including life drawing sessions, internal presentations and workshops, but also studio trips and global artist meet-ups. "We have different studios around the world and it's a great experience to be able to interact with the rest of the artists from the company to learn new things from each other and share artwork," says game artist Neo Maniego. "The art department really values learning and your career progression, so if there's anything you find particularly interesting that could help you as an artist, the department is open to discuss this with you."

ABOVE/BELOW King's character designs, while often brash, are expressive and immediately appealing. They've helped to drive the company's phenomenal success.





ABOVE The artwork and backgrounds in Farm Heroes Saga rely on a pastel-leaning palette with some.brighter accents.



RIGHT Farm Heroes Saga sees a trio of cute heroes set out to help other animals and drive Rancid the Racoon away.



LEFT Far Cry Primal is an offshoot of the long-running series where players take on the role of Stone Age hunter Takkar.

Ubisoft Montreal

The studio responsible for the Assassin's Creed and Far Cry series is shaping the future of games with one eye on the past

Ubisoft is famed for its sprawling open world games and ability to meld credible historical settings with flights of fantasy.

It's probably best known for the Assassin's Creed series, but the team also worked on the latest in the equally ambitious Far Cry series, the prehistoric game Far Cry Primal.

"At least 100 people in the art department have helped bring the Stone Age world of Oros to life," explains art director Mickael Labat, "from concept artists to modellers to world artists. But if you want to focus on the 2D creation and concept work, our team was composed of roughly ten illustrators who covered creating each region in the open world as well as the creation of each tribe's architectural style and characters."

The studio focused on "one idea: creating a credible and cohesive universe, built on facts," Labat explains. "We achieved this through discussions with many specialists, from anthropologists to historians. So when we ask ourselves 'why?' and 'how?', we can justify every element that was created and placed in the world of Oros – each tribe has its own way of life, based on humans living 12,000 years ago. We created the world in macro first, working on the foundations first, which helped us create a solid basis."

So what does Ubisoft look for? "We need the desire to create an immersive and credible universe," says Labat. "Basic artistic skills such as composition or lighting are an important element we look for in potential employees, but we need passionate and dedicated artists who constantly challenge the quality of their creation. Then, of course, we also ensure our proven artists support and grow our less experienced artists."



ABOVE Ubisoft's artists have conjured up imposing characters that blend bloodied hides, sharpened bones and some fearsome snarls.



The creatures have been lovingly created, as evinced by this fearsome-looking sabre toothed tiger design.

STUDIO DETAILS

Location: Canada



Team number:
Unspecified
Art department number:
Unspecified (hundreds, and ten focused on Primal 2D work)
AD's greatest artistic achievement: "Rising to the challenge of recreating the mood, ambiance, biomes and climate of a world inhabited by Stone Age humans"
Projects
Prince of Persia, Assassins Creed, For Honor.
montreal.ubisoft.com



Riot Games

The League Of Legends developer is a studio with a singular focus making the most of collaboration

Riot Games, the successful studio behind League Of Legends, turned ten in 2016.

But despite being the major company driving the eSports revolution, it has a flat and open approach to its game's creation.

"We're organised by product and in cross-disciplined teams," explains art director Adam Murguia. "An animator [will also think] about profile, silhouette, top-down read and visual hierarchy – everybody is used to talking about the things that are important to the product. It's really beneficial for all of the character artists to sit together in that scenario, because they just hold up a piece of work, get feedback in real time and they just make it better."

This fluid interaction is promoted by wheeled desks that change configuration on a weekly basis as individuals' focuses ebb and flow. "It does make tours hard," laughs Murguia. "but teams really do self organise."

The result is what Murguia calls "holistic product quality", where everybody is aware of the needs of everyone else and choices are settled upon organically and collaboratively. Concept artist Chris Campbell agrees: "This is one of the things about Riot – there's no one artist who just handles a piece and the existence of a character. It's never some solo project. It's open, it's a communal gathering of thoughts and ideas, and everyone is exploring every avenue and mentally combing over every aspect of a character."

Senior artist Dan Norton adds: "A lot of artists end up touching a champion from beginning to end. There might be one guy shepherding it, but part of the job is to be able to look at a spread of five or six different contributing artists and take yourself out of it and think, 'What is the coolest shit here? What makes the most sense? What tells the best story?' It doesn't matter which guy drew it. You go through phases and maybe try different things and, if you go down the wrong road, you just come back!"

STUDIO DETAILS

Location: US

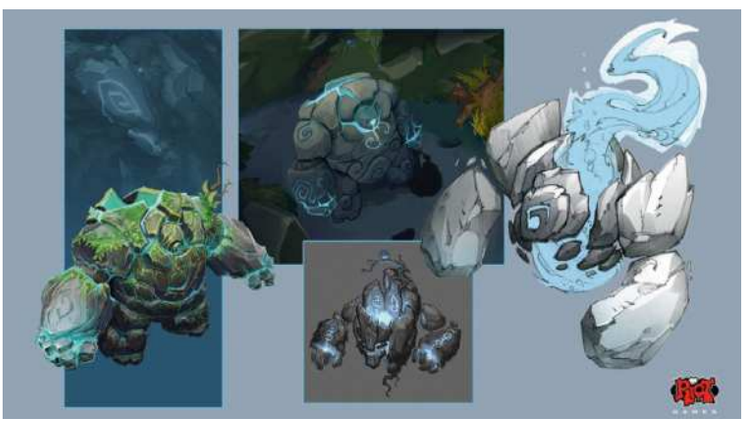


Team number:
Unspecified
Art department number:
120
AD's greatest artistic achievement: My handsome interviewer did not ask this...
Projects
League Of Legends: Clash Of Fates
www.riotgames.com





ABOVE With its organic culture of creativity, Riot is a unique games studio.



TOP LEFT There's a riot going on in this epic 'splash' by artist Suke Su.

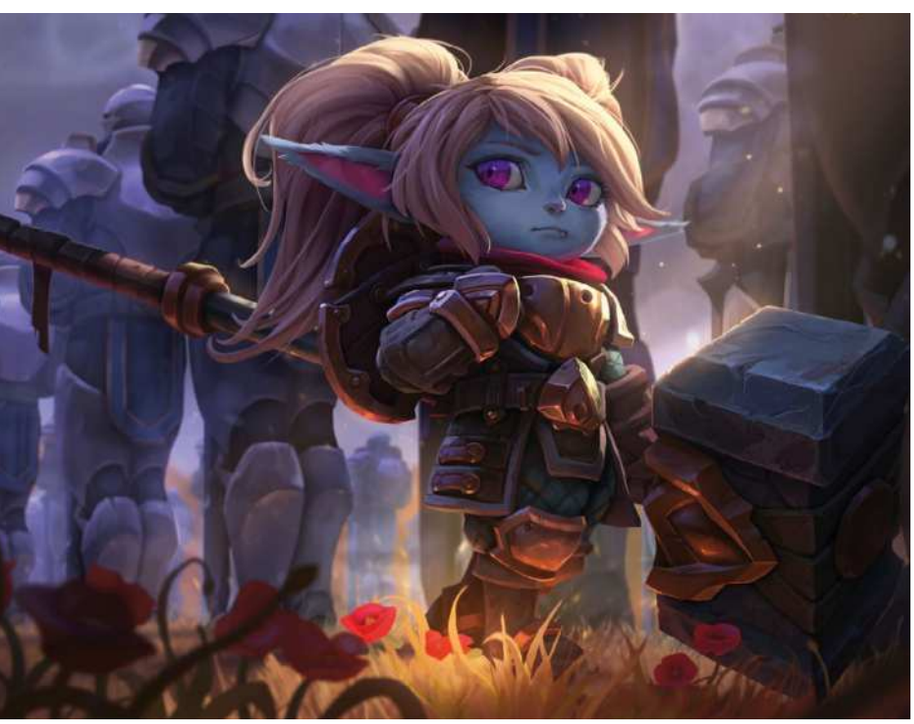
RIGHT Some concept art from the Summoner's Rift map. It's the most viewed game map in LoL and that's saying something!



Alvin Lee
Principal Artist

How would you describe the culture at Riot?
We're a results-only work environment. So, as long as you take care of your business, they treat you like adults. It's very free – and we're completely spoiled. We have a sketching group every Wednesday evening, and life drawing. We have "Riot University," which is scheduled classes where people who are very skilled at a particular craft teach others how to do that. I taught one on dynamic perspective, foreshortening, fish-eye lens, and stuff like that, how to draw all that kind of stuff. It went over well.

So there's a real sense of internal collaboration?
Yeah. We upload a lot of stuff onto an internal company website, kind of like Instagram but only for Rioters. We share art and I shared the tutorial and everyone loved it. We also get A-list artists to come in. We got Kim Jung Gi in to do demos, Marko Djurdjevic, and the entire Sixmorevodka team came in and did demos for like a week. We do that all the time.



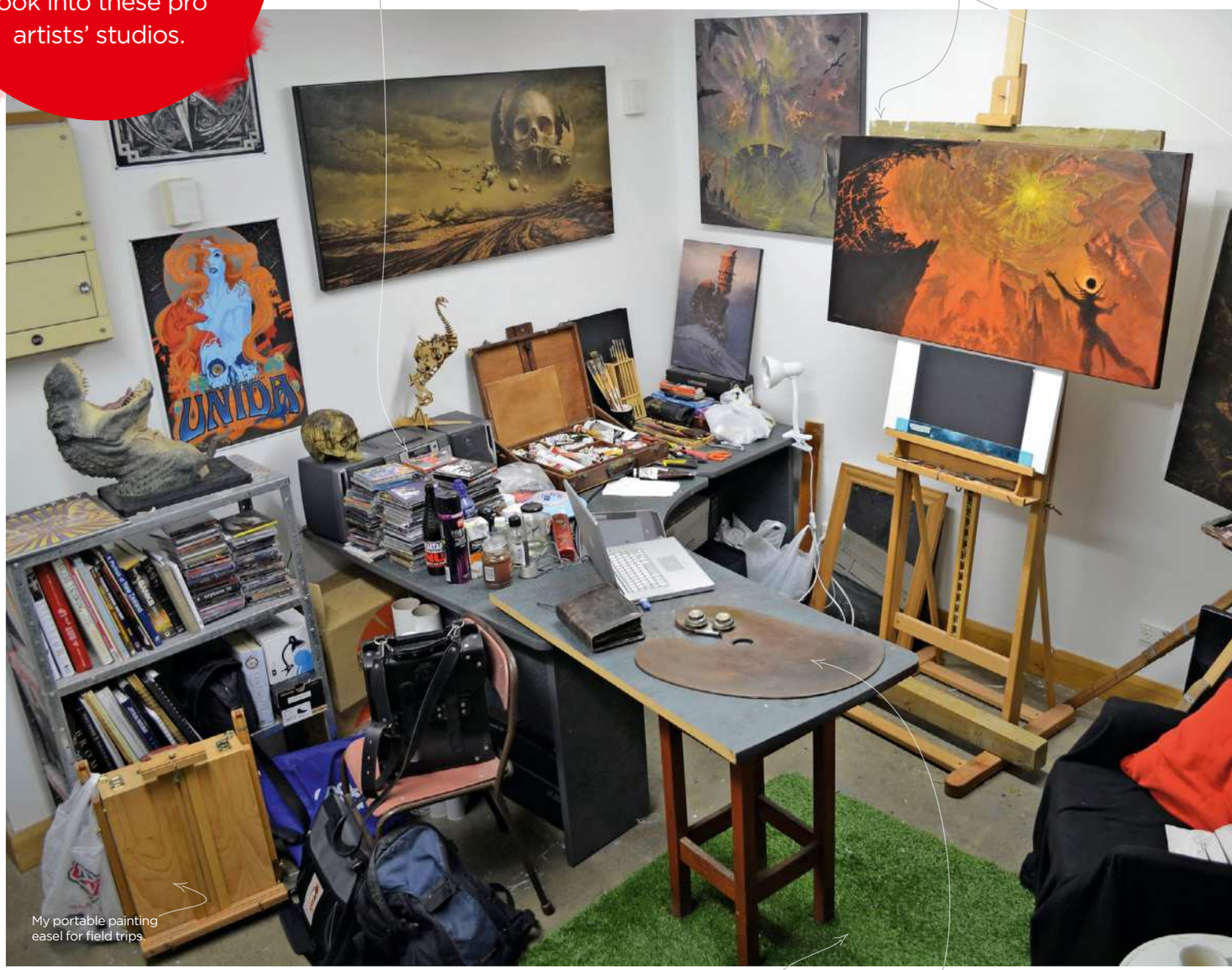
LEFT Poppy is one of the oldest champions in LoL, and has recently enjoyed a rework – both mechanically and visually.



ABOVE The Bilgewater Brew enables Rioters to get caffeinated for the day.

CREATIVE CENTRE

Take an exclusive look into these pro artists' studios.



In my rented studio, this old CD collection battles for space with oil paints, various liquids, my laptop and my Wacom. It's probably not the ideal combination.

Here are two recently finished album covers I produced in tandem. Usually I like to have multiple works on the go, so as to keep up momentum and avoid any lull between projects, which seems to inevitably happen anyway.

My portable painting easel for field trips.

Every studio needs a square of synthetic turf as a carpet! I just wish mine covered the entire floor. Concrete can get a bit hard underfoot.

My balanced wooden palette I brought back from Florence has served me well over the past few years. I tend not to try to keep mixed oil paint between sessions, because my erratic schedule means it can be days before I get back to it.

Nick Keller

Time share The Weta artist shows us around not one but two studios and allows us to see projects in progress



My workspaces are a somewhat schizophrenic scattering: there's my PC workstation at Weta Workshop, a similar but more humble setup at home, and a rented studio space at a local communal art centre in Wellington City.

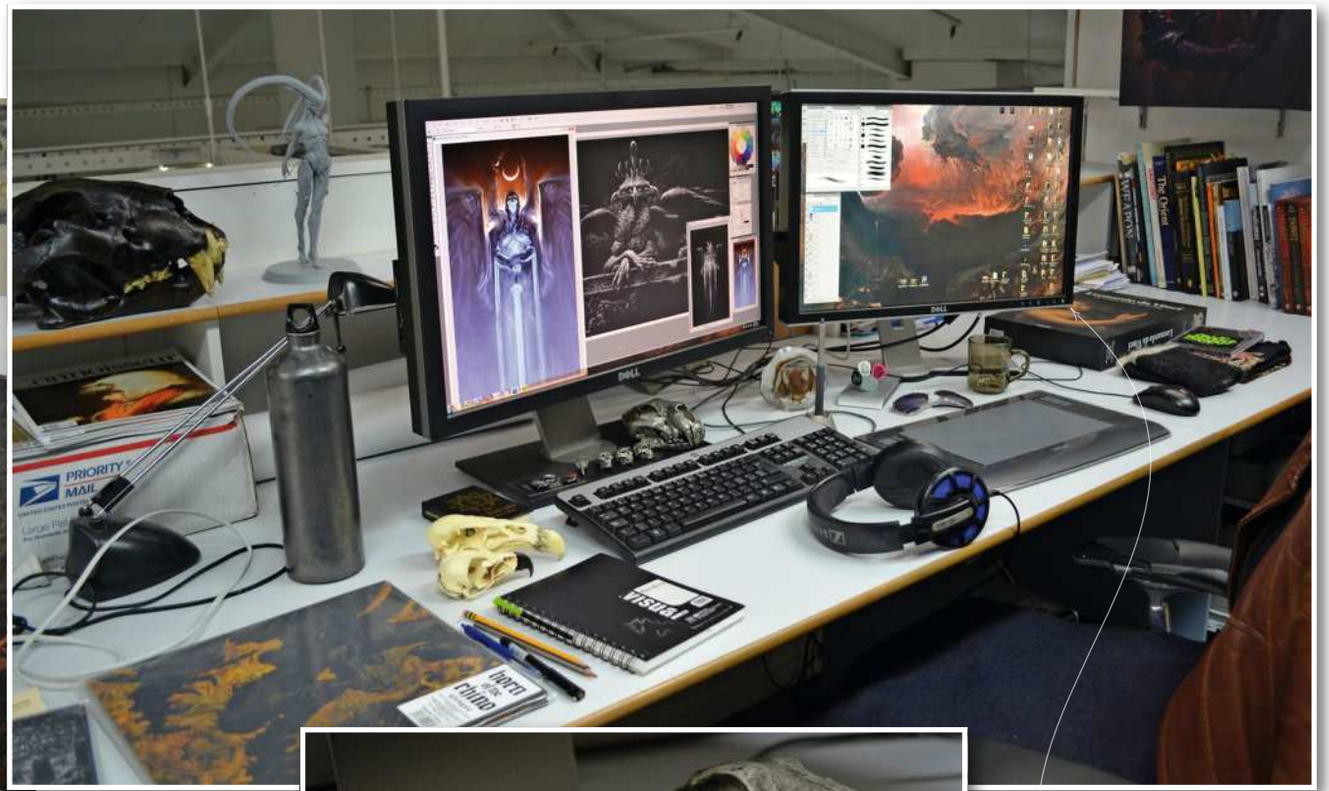
The day job as a concept designer – mainly for film and TV – requires me to almost exclusively create digital art. My painting studio caters to my love of traditional art. This means I can be working on a personal piece, or freelance projects such as heavy metal album covers. I can be found here at all hours at weekends and late on weekday evenings after I finish at Weta.

My setup is constantly evolving as I adapt my workflow. At the moment, a repurposed office desk with makeshift extension serves as a handy junk-accumulator. I can access said junk while painting at my main easel.

Unless I'm approaching a deadline, I'm not particularly good at working from home. I find myself much more focused when I have a dedicated workspace, absent of distractions. Generally speaking, I'll start an oil painting project in sketch form, then mock up some Photoshop compositions, colour palettes and so on. Quite often I



My exceedingly comfy reading/drawing chair. My partner claims it's hers and as a consequence it's made the journey between our two studios a number of times.



This is my Weta Workshop workstation. It's a PC with dual monitor and Wacom tablet setup on the mezzanine floor above the design room. The rather large expanse of tabletop seems to encourage a lateral spread of my junk. Pictured on-screen is a digital mock-up for a personal oil painting I'm planning out.



My progressively evolving collection of pewter skulls. Not quite in evolutionary order.

My temporary abode for recently finished album art projects that are looking for a more permanent home.



achieve this by staying after hours at Weta.

When I'm ready to move on to the canvas I migrate to the studio. Until recently, it was a bomb site of reference printouts stuck all over the place. A studio laptop has helped cut down on unnecessary printing.

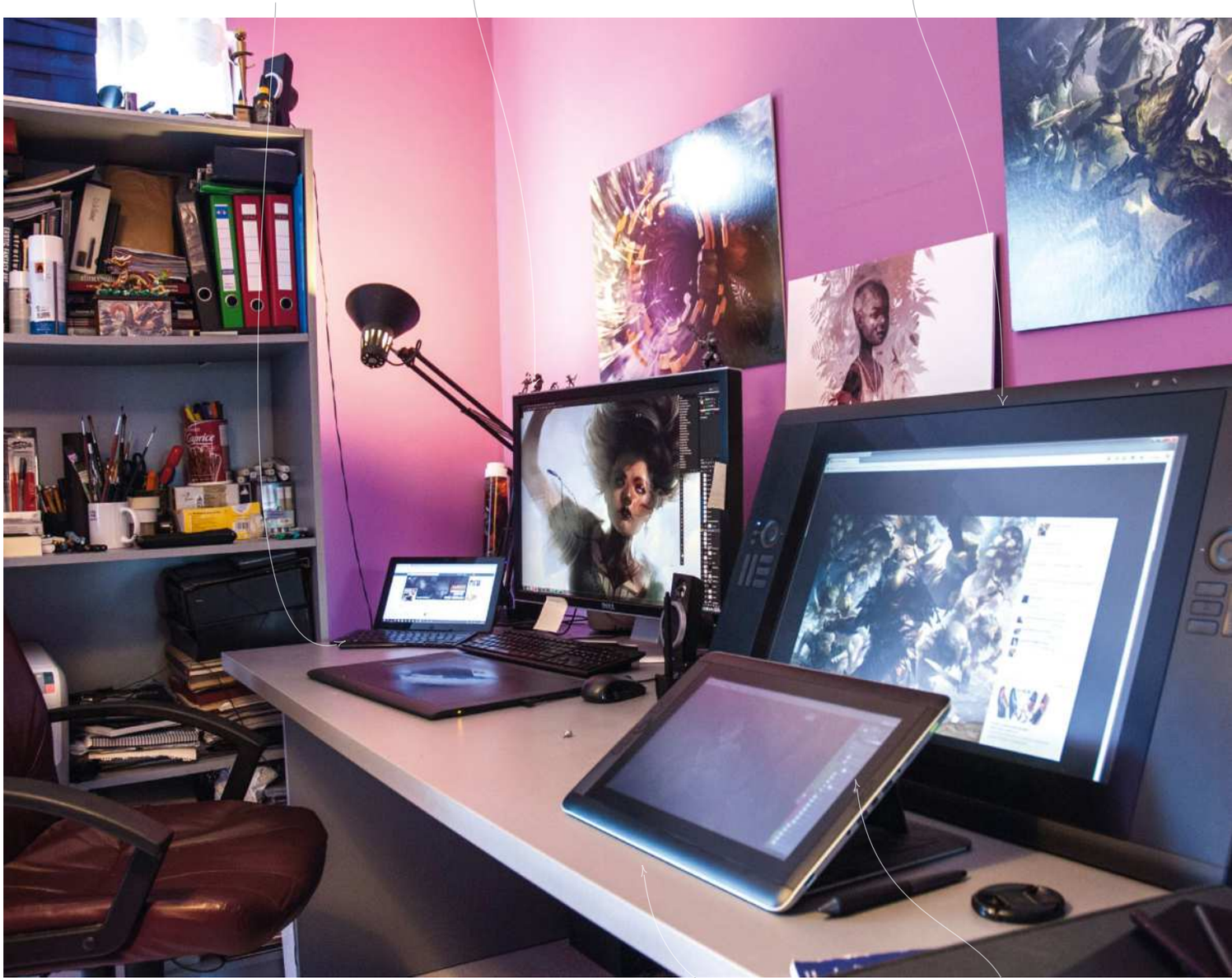
I'm still trying to find the sweet spot in taking a digital mock-up far enough to adequately inform my final piece, without overworking it and merely recreating it in paint. The thing that fascinates, satisfies and infuriates me about the art form is the evolutionary journey of a painting.

Nick is a senior concept artist at Weta Workshop in Wellington, New Zealand. Visit www.nickkellerart.com to see more of his art.

I've always felt a need for a good option for mobile work. This Windows tablet – a Samsung 7 Slate – was a good compromise on the more expensive and much heavier (at that time) solutions for mobile work, before Wacom brought out the Companion.

My Dell 3007WFP 30-inch monitor has been with me for many years. It still serves me well and doesn't show any signs of needing to be replaced.

I bought a Cintiq 24 HD three years ago, but I've never quite got used to it. However, I do intend to get the Cintiq 27 HD – I'm full of hope for it.



My working space has to be comfortable, spacious and able to fit all my gear. I have a custom desk with an enhanced table that's wide and deep enough to work comfortably.

My Wacom Companion is a real companion! Finally, a good mobile solution for artists on the move, even if it's just so I can work under the thick shades in the garden unrestricted by power issues.

Svetlin Velinov

Dungeons and dragons The Bulgarian illustrator on why his home studio is his castle – and occasionally his prison



My studio is in my home and my home is my castle. This is a great advantage to me – and a significant disadvantage, because distractions can reduce productivity.

The other risk is that the castle might turn into a dungeon, which is why I try to find a balance by travelling, communicating and taking a rest from work. When your job has no specific working hours, you can easily fall victim to your own good intentions.

Artists must express themselves through their work. This only happens when your environment is in harmony with your personal preferences. In my workplace I've optimised my layout so everything is within reach of a small movement of my chair. My desk is big enough for all my tech gear, but also has enough space for me to draw with traditional media when I want or need to.

I used a tablet for the first time in 1996, so I'm a bit conservative. Despite owning a whole arsenal of fancy tablets, my favourite is the conventional Intuos 5 L. This is the one I use most when I'm in my studio.

I own a Cintiq Companion, enabling me to draw whenever I want. This is great for me, because no matter how cozily you've set up your working space, sometimes the



It's important for me to find time for doodles, as you can see in my pile of sketchbooks. There's always one close to hand.





I've painted a fair bit of art for Magic: The Gathering in my time. Although this doesn't really explain why I've got a card shop expanding in my studio!

This is a souvenir from Magic: the Gathering Grand Prix in Beijing 2014. A box of cards and a dragon – a souvenir bought with my last few yuans at the airport.



A "Behind the Iron Curtain" workshop took place in Bucharest, Romania, in 2010. This is a signed card by Kekai Kotaki, who was one of the instructors, along with Stephan Martinière, Mark Goerner and Alex Alvarez.

These folders on my bookshelf may suggest a bit of tidiness in my work, but it's quite a misleading impression.

I have a whiteboard to remind me that I can always find inspiration for painting outside my studio. If the board becomes a painting, a new blank whiteboard takes its place.



isolation is too much and you need to find a safe haven from your castle. The ability to work fulfillingly on a mobile device is a big advantage and I recommend it for battling the boredom of the fixed workplace.

My 30-inch Dell isn't new, but it's rock solid and serves me very well. It can all be upgraded, of course, but first I have to finance the replacement of my Cintiq 24 HD. The low resolution, weak backlight and matrix of the monitor, plus the lack of brightness and sharpness of the image, meant I couldn't take full advantage of this otherwise great working tool. I have huge expectations for the new model.

People who consider their profession to be a vocation are blessed. As an illustrator and concept artist I'm in this category: I can travel all over the world, work on interesting and fun projects, and face a constant challenge to surpass myself to keep up with the demands of a constantly changing industry. It makes the job dynamic and keeps me away from routine. Nice, huh?

Svetlin is a freelance illustrator and concept artist. You can see more of his work at www.velinov.com



On this and the adjacent shelf is a collection of old cameras, which includes the Asahi Pentax you can see here.

My sketchbooks from the past few years contain many studies and miscellaneous drawings. I remember doing a lot of concepts when I went to Paris on the TGV (high-speed train) for Dontnod Entertainment.

This is a Mega Bloks spaceship that I made with my son. I simply wanted to decorate my desk.

My young son's first drawings, with many original compositions of lines and stains!

This little bronze statue was made by my father. I saw it throughout my youth and it's nice to have it on show.

Fred Augis

Home comforts Technology sits alongside traditional tools in the French concept artist's cosy, living-room studio space



My office is in my flat, near the centre of Rennes, north-west France. It's a very calm part of the city; I can see an old church from my window and have far-reaching views of the roofs of the houses in my district.

I separated off my living room with a big bookcase filled with artbooks and personal objects. My workspace is uncluttered and small, but comfortable. This means I can concentrate on my projects yet still have items in reach to inspire me in my work.

I use my old Cintiq 21UX, because I prefer to draw to a 3/4 ratio when working on concept art, rather than using a widescreen device. My second screen is helpful for displaying references. My workstation is a loyal, seven-year-old PC. I'm not a hardcore gamer, so I don't have a modern graphics card fitted in it – it's just powerful enough to handle Hotline Miami and run Photoshop.

On an average work day, I'll begin with a long coffee and check my email, the news and things on the web. After that I try to organise all the work I want to do that day, keeping in mind my client's deadlines.

At first, I found it hard to collaborate with international studios. I was accustomed to working closely with French game studios

I like to keep some inspirational items close by, including the portfolio of Philippe Druillet, a book on the art of Raymond Lemstra and a Kent Williams drawing.

It's essential for me to see my art, to ensure a project is coherent, so I use this white space as my concept wall.





The framed artwork is an environment piece that was done by my grandfather. On the right is a test print of an image of mine that looks better than it did on-screen.

Just some of the art books I keep within easy reach. Eagle-eyed readers might also spot the collector's edition of Hotline Miami 2!

I installed a telescopic arm for my tablet because the original support didn't offer a comfortable position for long periods of work. It's one of my best investments.





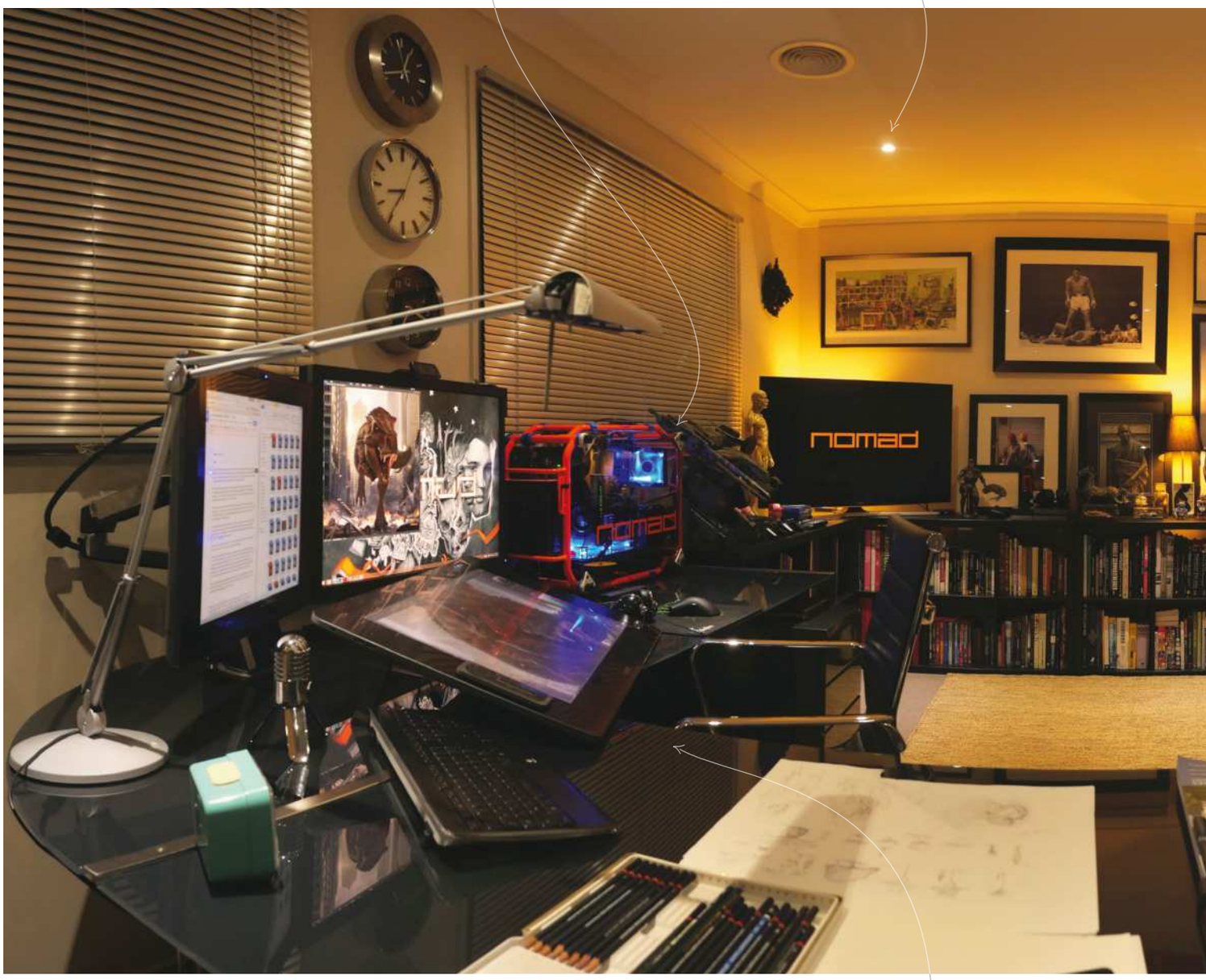
and wanted to match my hours with them. When feedback comes at 1am or even 5am, it isn't a good balance for me or my family.

I got a long desk so I have a little space to draw in my sketchbook. I can scan drawings and do a paint-over in Photoshop. I prefer making pictures with a black line on paper to using my tablet. I find that my perception and concentration levels aren't the same. I'm thinking of getting an art space better suited for traditional drawing and painting work.

Fred is a freelance concept artist. You can see his work at fredaugis.tumblr.com

My open-chassis Monster Rig – I chose this chassis because I absolutely love the rugged beastly aesthetic.

The downlights in the ceiling were upgraded with dimming capabilities to adjust for better video exposure if I'm recording video.



My dark grey glass table is fitted with a side return to keep everything within easy reach.

Darren Yeow

Pimp my ride From mirrored walls to optimum lighting, the Australian artist explains his quest for the perfect workspace



Over the past few years, my career has shifted from concept artist to a creative-business role. I still design and draw every day but also have other responsibilities, such as sales, marketing, finance and team leadership as my business develops from client work to creating primarily for my own brands – and I think my office reflects this.

My method is primarily digital because it shortens the client-feedback process. I still sketch on paper but tend not to use "messy" media so I keep my office clean for client or investor meetings. If I need textures, I create them in the garage, my second workspace for painting, sculpting and woodwork.

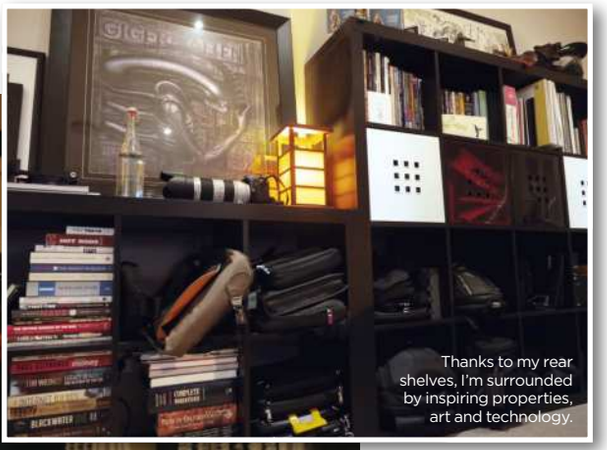
The work rig is an open-chassis, liquid-cooled monster that can handle almost any task I throw at it, from 2D or 3D to 4k video production. I have three monitors attached to it: two Cintiqs (21UX and 27QHD) for on-screen drawing and painting, and a large 30-inch monitor to place references or do business stuff. I also have a separate TV to review footage and do presentations.

The office is on the second floor to the rear of our newly built home. While I love being near my son and wife, I sometimes need to hit tight schedules and this setup enables

The walls have embedded sound-insulation, which means I'm able to Skype international clients at any time without waking my family.



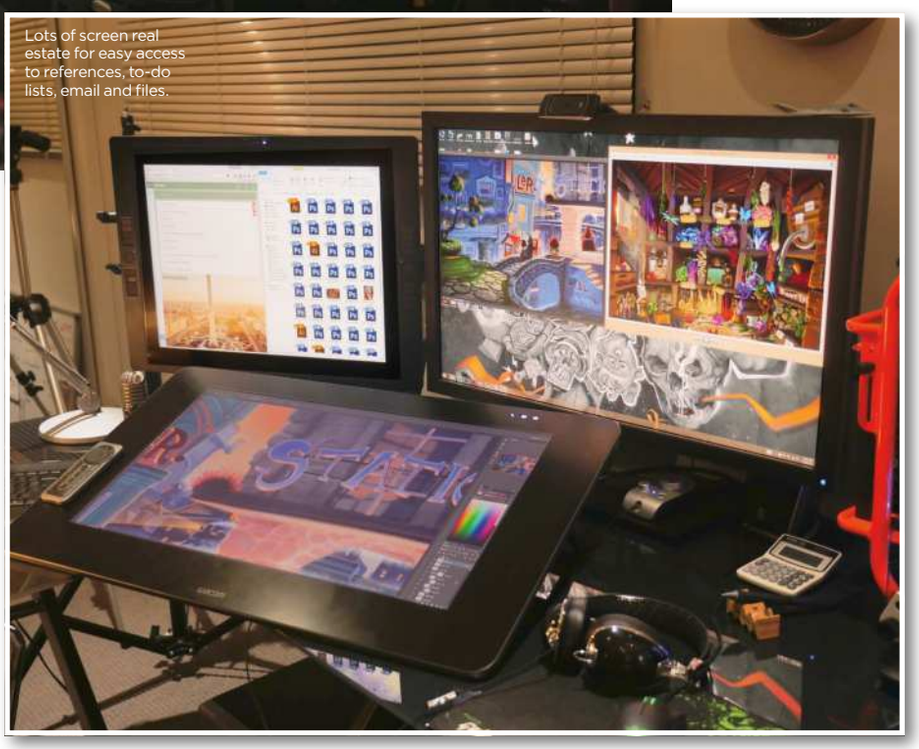
Reference and inspirational books on a myriad of subjects. I never had the chance to go to art school, so these books were my education and they mean a lot to me.



Thanks to my rear shelves, I'm surrounded by inspiring properties, art and technology.



Found gifts from my toddler and a photo of when my wife was pregnant – to remind me of what's important.



Lots of screen real estate for easy access to references, to-do lists, email and files.

physical separation when necessary.

I have an NBN connection (the fastest residential internet in Australia), making it possible to upload client files in 10-15 minutes instead of a day or more, and I also upgraded the sliding wardrobe doors with ceiling-to-floor mirrors so I could use myself as art reference and practise presentations.

I'm already planning my next office/home, but I do admit the current setup works well. I feel inspired, relaxed and ready to do good work whenever I enter the room.

Darren created the Nomad Art Satchel, and you can see his art at www.stylus-monkey.com

SHOWCASE

From cinematic fantasy landscapes to the intricate mechanics of a sci-fi vehicle, these contemporary creatives are able to engineer worlds and give life to characters that resonate. They visualise the previously unknown, unrealised and untouched, whether it's another planet, an undreamed-of technology or an alien race. They work within films, behind the scenes of your favourite video games and some, even, from the comfort of their own home. Some draw from their own life and yearn to tell stories; others draw on imagination and tap into their deepest subconscious. Prepare to be inspired!

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ALEX JAY BRADY
LOCATION UK
WEB AJ-BRADY.SQUARESPACE.COM

A night-owl, Alex tends to work best at night and alone in a quiet room, and in many ways has forged her own path. "I find you get out what you put in to something, so often the work I enjoy the most gets a good response." Many of her favourite SF stories surface in her work, whether she intends them to or not. "It's how I get things out of my head so they leave me alone!" she says.

Currently going through a gender transition, Alex was concerned that coming out and overhauling her life would wreck her creativity. "I was genuinely worried that if I wasn't emotionally tortured I wouldn't be able to draw, but no, it seems fine, better even!" Through her transition she has enjoyed experimenting with make-up. "I've found drawing on my face has parallels with drawing on a graphics tablet! It's also helped me learn a bit more about facial anatomy."





LUMBERJACKS
"For Nuthin But Mech 3 by Lorin Wood. Some robot lumberjacks and their human co-workers move from one logging area to another. Thanks to Edon Guraziu for help with the droid design."





JOURNEY TO THE GEOMETRY STACK "This was fun – I adore Eon and have read it many times. The buggies are inflatable, so they can expand their living space. The objects on stalks are automatic defensive weapons."

SMELOST LIGHT GROUND-EFFECT ATOMIC AIRCRAFT CARRIER "From work by me and Stanley Von Medvey Jr. on a casual adaptation of Missile Gap by Charlie Stross, a bizarre sci-fi story."

LOUNGE INTERIOR "An image commissioned to promote Syfy Channel's TV series Ascension at San Diego Comic-Con. I hoped to make something that looked classic, using flat colours to simulate gouache. It was a fun job!"





ALEX KONSTAD
LOCATION US
WEB WWW.ALEXKONSTAD.COM

In 2008 Alex was at university studying fine art when he discovered conceptart.org. "I went from being told drawing monsters and illustrative pictures wasn't actual art to having my whole world dismantled with awesomeness on the CA forums and learning you could make a career out of making these kinds of pictures!" he laughs. Dropping out shortly after, he began focusing on his passions.

"I think it's important to constantly pull and mix as many influences and touch-stones as possible into your work," he says. "I'm finding a passion for world-building lately and in turn learning how to tell stories in those worlds." In his spare time Alex dabbles in traditional sculpting, model building and some painting in gouache and acrylics. "I guess all in all I stay pretty busy with art, tinkering and tampering with a lot of creative stuff, so it all comes full circle."

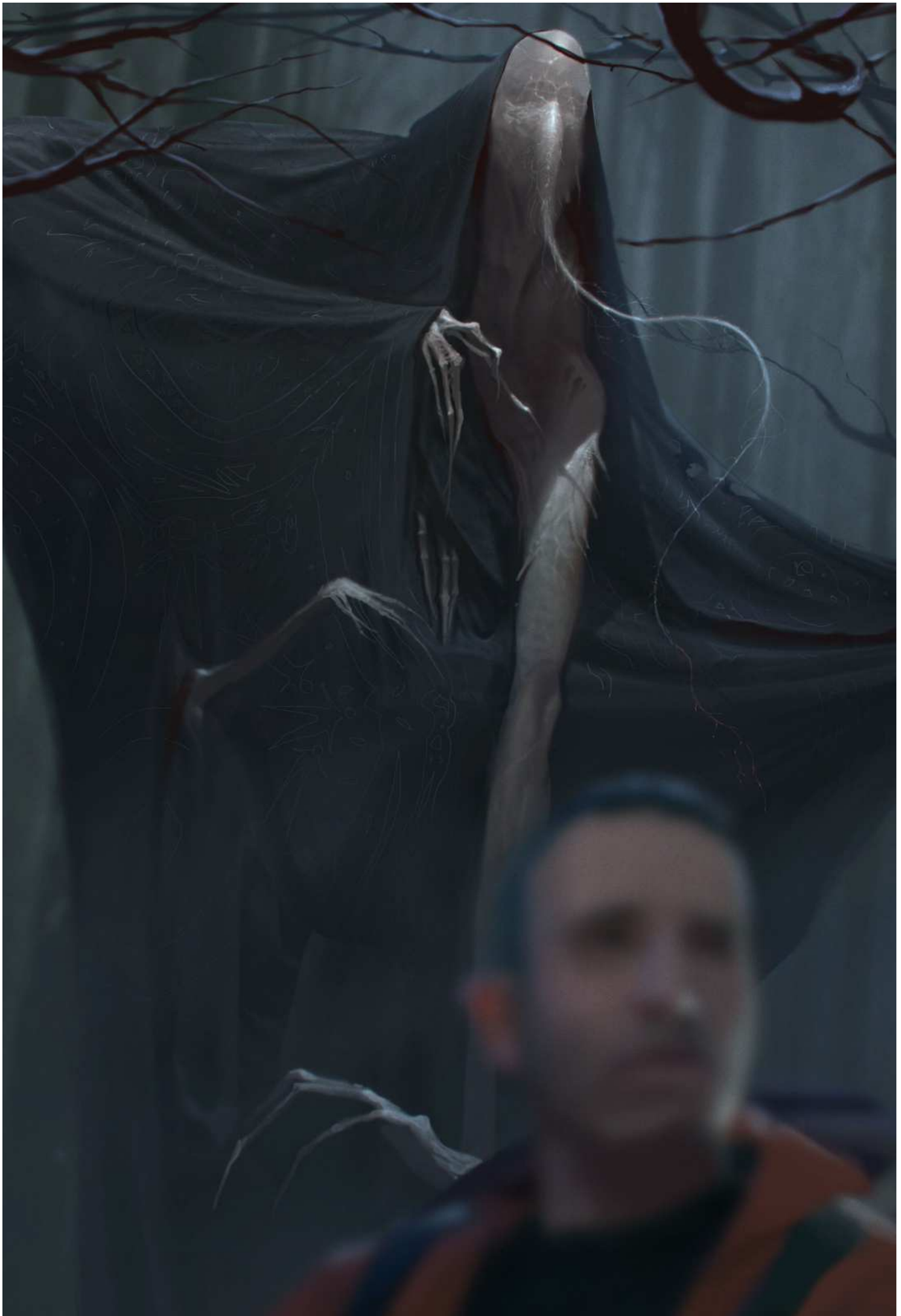




BOOGIEMAN "With a wheezing rattle the closet door creaked open, waking me. As I came to, I found the silence much more unsettling than the presence before me."

SLENDERMAN "I stopped to adjust my bike light, and I saw it. Two sickly gaunt feet, pallid and dry, stretching into oblivion."

THE BLACK-EYED MAN "The last leg of the hike was maddening. I couldn't for the life of me place where the rustling was coming from. At the rear of the group, I seemed to be the only one noticing."





DANIEL ROMANOVSKY
LOCATION CANADA
WEB WWW.FORMLANGUAGE.NET

"Being an artist is something more than the craft of painting and drawing. It really is the journey of your life. It is a way of seeing the world and interacting with it," explains Daniel. "It is the development and use of a language that is used to bridge the gap between the conscious and the subconscious mind. Like any language it serves to organise the world and help you find your place in it." Daniel doesn't see himself as a "concept artist" but as a "visual artist" who has worked on a variety of projects, some of which can be labelled as conceptual art.

Daniel is a fan of good cinematography, utilising a huge library of stills from his favourite films as references for his art. "I also look at a lot of vintage photography," he reveals. Steichen, Julia Margaret Cameron and Ernest Brookes are among his inspirations – "there is a certain raw emotion in there that I find remarkable."





THE APC "With vehicle design I start with the environment and allow it to influence my decision-making when working on the vehicle. I wanted the APC to feel like it has seen a lot of action and been repaired and patched up multiple times."





THE SNAKE CHARMER "I aimed for a traditional oil painting look, inspired by 19th century orientalist artwork. I wanted to give each character a unique identity while having them be engaged in the narrative of the scene."

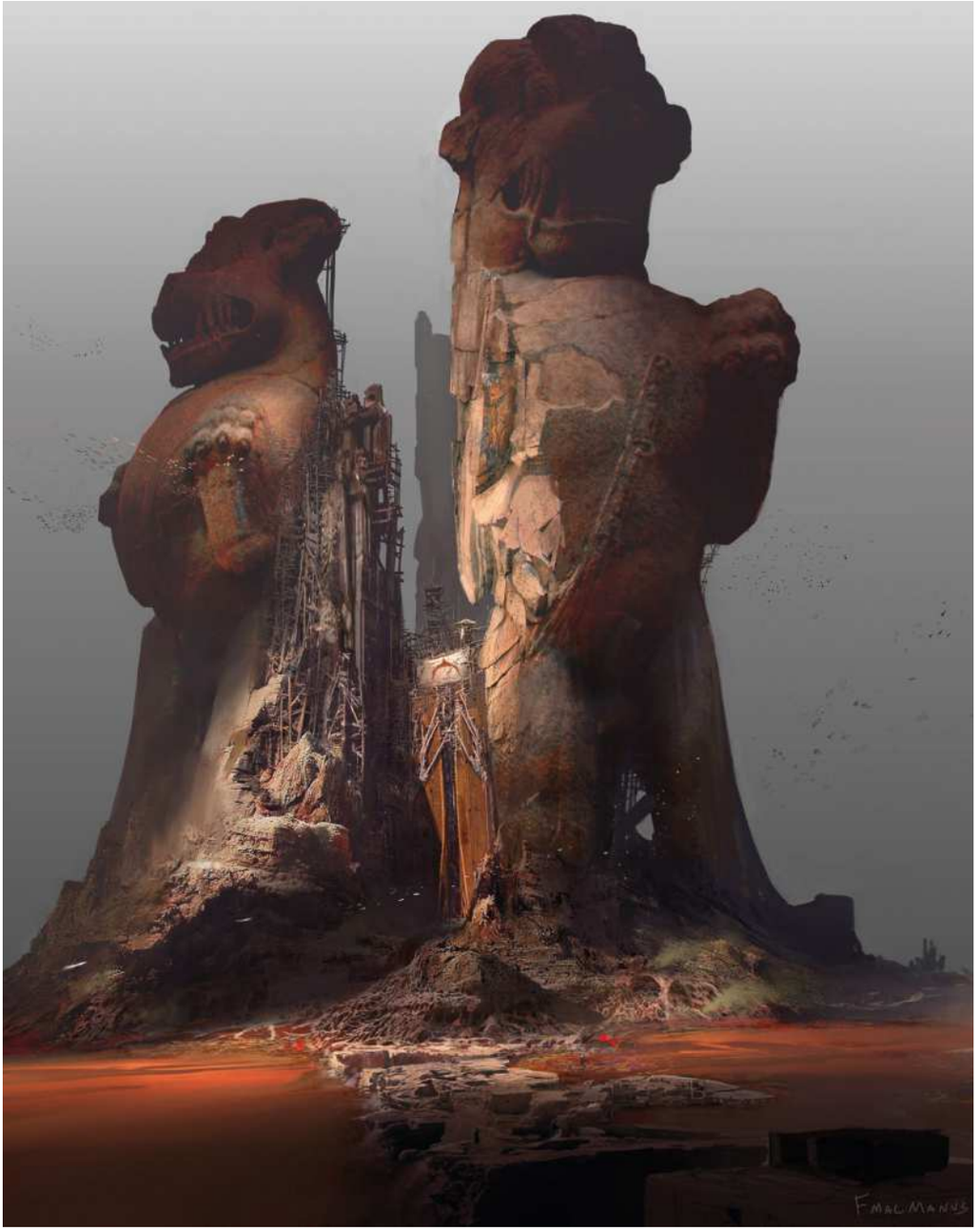
THE MONKEY KING'S LAIR "A fun personal project. The initial inspiration was Jabba the Hutt smoking his hookah. The main challenge was capturing the right sense of scale and weight for the character. "



FINNIAN MACMANUS
LOCATION US
WEB WWW.FMACMANUS.COM

Finnian's first full-time job as a concept artist was for none other than Sony Santa Monica. But it didn't all come easy. "I feel struggles and breaking through them are one of the best ways to learn," he says. "If the path is ever too easy I find that I am not learning as much as I should." He admits that functional design has been his most recent learning curve, grasping car mechanics or how an engineer constructs a skyscraper.

Finnian takes inspiration from his travels. Having visited Turkey, Morocco and India, he is able to inject aspects of these colourful cultures into his paintings. He's also a composer. "I find that music relates strongly to the personal work I do," he reveals, "and there are many musical scores which have inspired lighting, emotion and composition in my work."



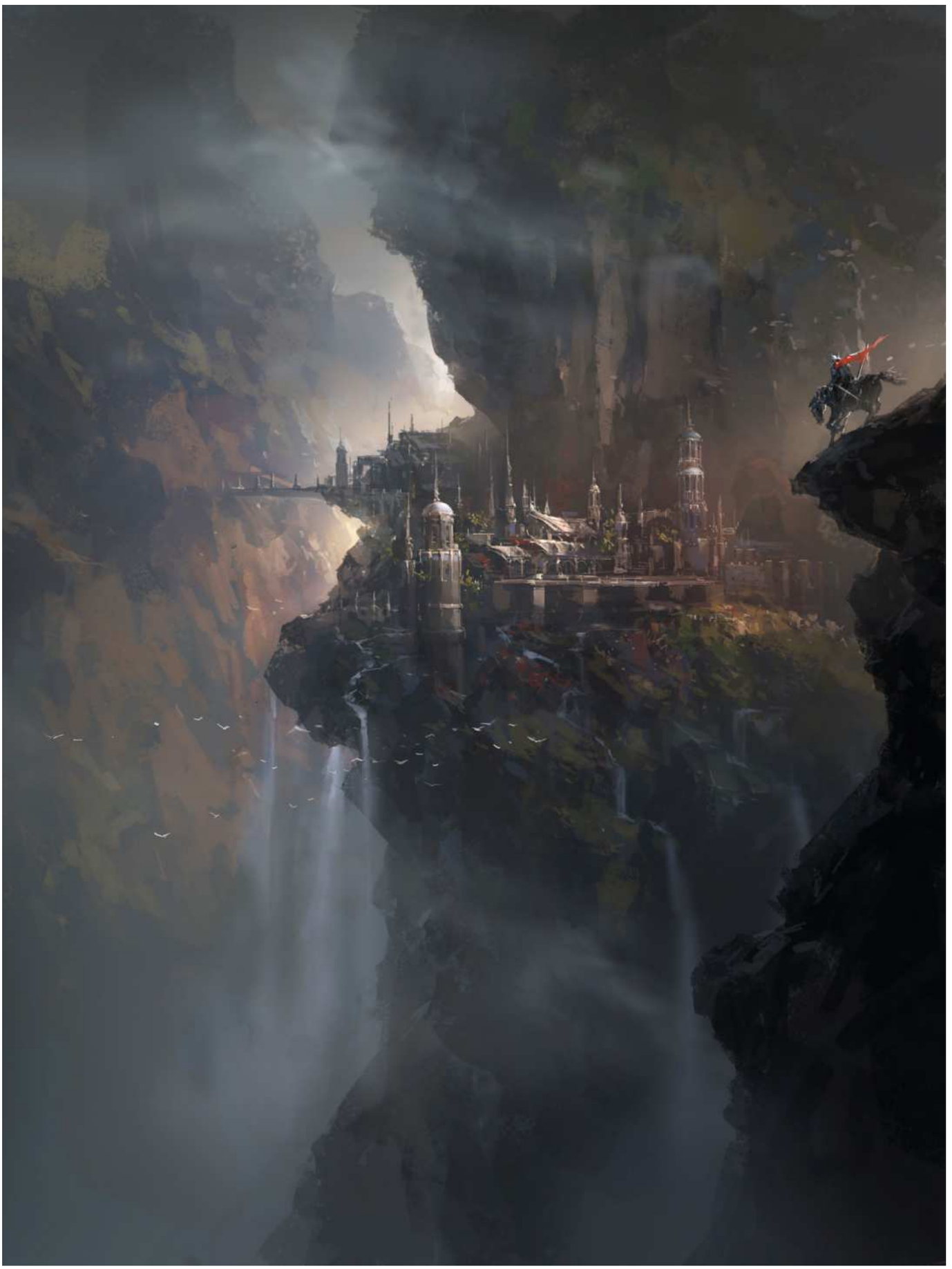
THE BROTHERS "These lion statues are relics from a forgotten era, now claimed and fortified by a local bandit tribe seeking refuge from the harsh environment."



ENERGIZING CHAMBER "Behind Luithica's utopian mask of beauty, the many power cores generate power for the city but also secrete pollutants that erode its atmosphere."

GATES TO SIKRI "Part of the Blue Valley project. Travellers journey here for both trade and religious purposes. This ancient coral structure has been hollowed out, and many live and barter inside."







JONG-WON PARK
LOCATION SOUTH KOREA
WEB WWW.J-CIRCLE.NET

Jong-won, known as JC, says his main inspiration has been his own family: his wife and two sons. They have given him the drive to be the artist he is today – well, alongside many other artists who influenced him. "I get inspired by many fantasy and sci-fi films, such as Star Wars and Lord of the Rings," says JC. In fact it was Star Wars that sparked his ambition to become a concept artist – "originally my dream was to be a cartoonist," he reveals. Currently working in everything from video games and feature films to TV commercials and publications, JC admits he'd like to make even more creative things, and "perhaps become a pioneer of something..."



MARKET "This market sells giant robots – just so someone could buy one if they needed it! The scene is set in the near future, but I tried to add a contemporary realism. I designed the robots with a simple silhouette that expresses the scale."



SUNSET CASTLE "I wanted to depict a castle on a cliff inspired by The Lord of the Rings. I wanted to focus on lighting and scale. I added the 'knight' on the right cliff so that the viewer could feel the huge scale."

SHRINE "I imagined a place built inside a huge head. To enter, you need a shuttle or flight vehicle. This floating head in the sky is independent from the world beneath. I tried to make it look fantastic, somewhere I'd want to live, a paradise, the face expressing a mysterious feeling."



HONG SOONSANG
LOCATION SOUTH KOREA
WEB HONGSOONSANG.TUMBLR.COM

A surprising influence in Hong's work is innocence. "I try not to lose it," he says. "Children won't be moved by my work if I draw from a grown-up perspective!" After working in the games industry for approximately ten years, as both a background artist and games developer, Hong was able to develop his own style while examining the aesthetics in the games he helped to make. During his six years as a background artist, Hong says he was able to learn about cinematography, composition and flow – all of which has, no doubt, coloured his dreams to be an animation filmmaker. "I am going to make an animated film with a world and story I created myself," he says. "I believe what I have been doing as a concept artist will be the cornerstone for this."



DEFENSE CORPS, NOAH PROJECT (ARK CITIZEN)
Noah Project is a futuristic adaptation of the story of Noah's Ark. It revolves around these characters, members of a squad that protects Arc City.

ALBERT THE KING'S ADVISER, ROBIN HOOD PROJECT "Albert is a loyal Chief Adviser of Richard I of England, AKA Richard the Lionheart."

SINDY: BRAT PACK IN SHERWOOD FOREST, ROBIN HOOD PROJECT
"The second of three siblings, Sindy is one of the members of a clan in Sherwood Forest known as the 'Brat Pack'."







© Fantasy Flight Games



KIRSTEN ZIRNGIBL
LOCATION US
WEB WWW.KIRSTENZIRNGIBL.COM

Out of college for only a few years, Kirsten is still finding her feet in the industry, but has already dipped her toes into publishing (with no less than Magic: The Gathering!), video games and TV.

In high school, she wanted to be an engineer, and world-building is still her passion. "When I have any kind of thought, I often make a 'mini-world' around it so that it has a home. It's a playground/scaffold for related thoughts."

A big Lego fan as a kid, she loves "the concept of modular design, how the same shapes could be used differently. Building a complex 3D scene is a Lego fangirl's dream come true!" Another influence is her synaesthesia: "I see geometric shapes, spaces and colours in my mind's eye in association to thinking."



TIDEPIPE STATION "I did this when exploring visual possibilities for my old Fymos world. Passengers wait for water-propelled tube trains powered by tidal pressure on the gas giant's moon."



KAMPALA "An African city over 100 years in the future, done for Netrunner. I spun off the fact that some indigenous settlements were designed around fractal recursion, and extrapolated that and other traditional motifs."

THE PLATFORM "Done to explore possibilities for my Simversion universe. It's a 'virtual ecosystem' which forms a kind of emergent intelligence. An example of SF inspired by my synaesthesia. It is personally meaningful."



MICHAL LISOWSKI
LOCATION POLAND
WEB WWW.MICHALLISOWSKI.COM

Michal explains that when it comes to approaching a new project, everything happens inside his head. "I don't have any sketchbook or any kind of note tool right now," he says. The artist has provided illustrations for the likes of Ubisoft, Disney and The Discovery Channel. One of his most interesting projects, he says, was Halo 4. "I like very unique, extraordinary projects, maybe weird in some way," he reveals. "I like to be far away from typical digital painting subjects, trying not to think only about fantasy and SF but more into feelings, emotions and atmosphere." Michal's always striving to take on more challenging and unique projects, but for now he's settling for The Wall Street Journal...







2 x 2013 © Ars Thanea / Casino Heroes



READING ALIEEN "A personal piece. I wanted to paint something a bit lyrical, a bit surreal, as a continuation of my Astro series. The character is reading the comic ALIEEN by Lewis Trondheim (btw highly recommended!)."

CASINO HEROES
Characters painted for the Casino Heroes project by Ars Thanea. Left to right: gladiator-inspired Tigris; Titanium Troll; Crabman, a surfer infected by crab pollution and turned into a bad boss; Hell Hector, guarding his treasure.





2 x 2013 © Ars Thanea / Casino Heroes



PABLO CARPIO

LOCATION SPAIN
WEB HTTP://IFXM.AG/PABCAR

"I don't want to die without going to space," says Pablo. But seeing his stunning SF visuals, you'd be forgiven for believing he'd already been there. His passions include playing guitar (and bass), and music informs much of his art, taking inspiration from film and video game soundtracks. The title of *artist*, he believes, is reserved for old masters like Michelangelo and Paco de Lucia; he says he's "just a guy that likes to paint and design monsters, spaceships and castles." When somebody happened to tell him one day that "someone had to make the drawings and designs to create films," his path was set.

As a lover of chromatic minimalism and artists like Yves Klein, Pablo puts colour at the forefront: "I just take pictures of colours I like, and that's enough to think about a spaceship, a landscape or a full colour script."

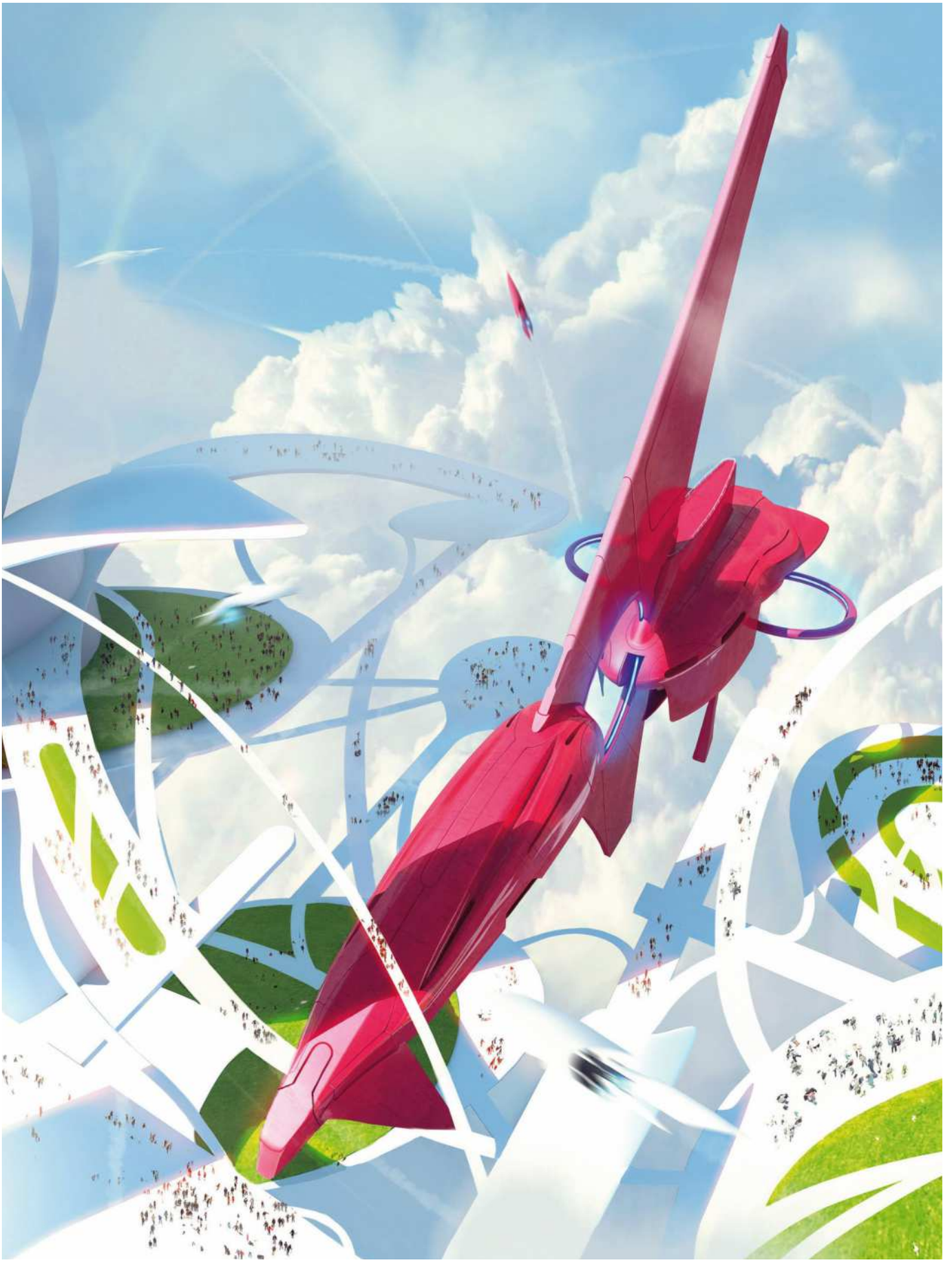


FACE TO FACE
"I used to do a lot of futuristic and sci-fi artworks, so I decided to do something inspired by the Uncharted series for this one – something fantastic but in a real context at the same time."

CERASTES "Like 'The Arrival of the Spica' [see right], this started as an experiment with organic shapes for buildings and spaceships. Sometimes I like my compositions to look like an 'explosion' around a focal point."

THE ARRIVAL OF THE SPICA "Inspired by some works by David Levy, this is a personal experiment to develop designs I did with some friends in a meetup in Warsaw, when we made about 100 sketches over a pizza."











SEAN SEVESTRE
LOCATION UK
WEB WWW.SEANSEVESTRE.COM

French-born artist Sean believes that "every painting is a unique puzzle to be solved in its own way." A self-taught artist, he locked himself away for three years practising obsessively and immersing himself in learning and improving.

Often, Sean starts his work with basic shapes, focusing on value and colour harmony. "I like to experiment," he says. "There are certain ways of painting I prefer. I like to get my colour harmonies in early now, but the more ways you know how to work, the better equipped you are to handle the next puzzle."

Sean practises acrobatics in his spare time. "I learn a lot from it and I take those lessons forward to other areas of my life, like art, and vice-versa," he reveals. "Everything is intertwined."



GUARD "The Orientalists created some of my favourite 19th century work. Artists like Ludwig Deutsch inspired me to try the aesthetic myself. The low cast shadow and high white wall are the initial idea I built around."



ESCORT "This began with some blobs of murky greens and reds. I knew that would be the colour palette for the piece. With the general values and composition down, I start to think about shapes and carve it to a finish."

CEREMONY "The process of painting is often a lot less linear than an image suggests. I scrapped and revised big parts of this at several stages because things weren't working. A lot of learning can happen at those points."


MASTERS
OF ART

It's one thing to study the work of artists and designers you admire, drawing inspiration from what they've done and learning from how they did it. But for truly in-depth insight into their techniques and their thinking, there's nothing better than their own words. In these interviews and Q-&-A sessions, some of the leading lights of the creative world tell their own stories and give you a direct insight into their methods and processes. Plus, we asked some of today's top artists to talk about what they admire in the work of others – a unique expert perspective on the great by the great!

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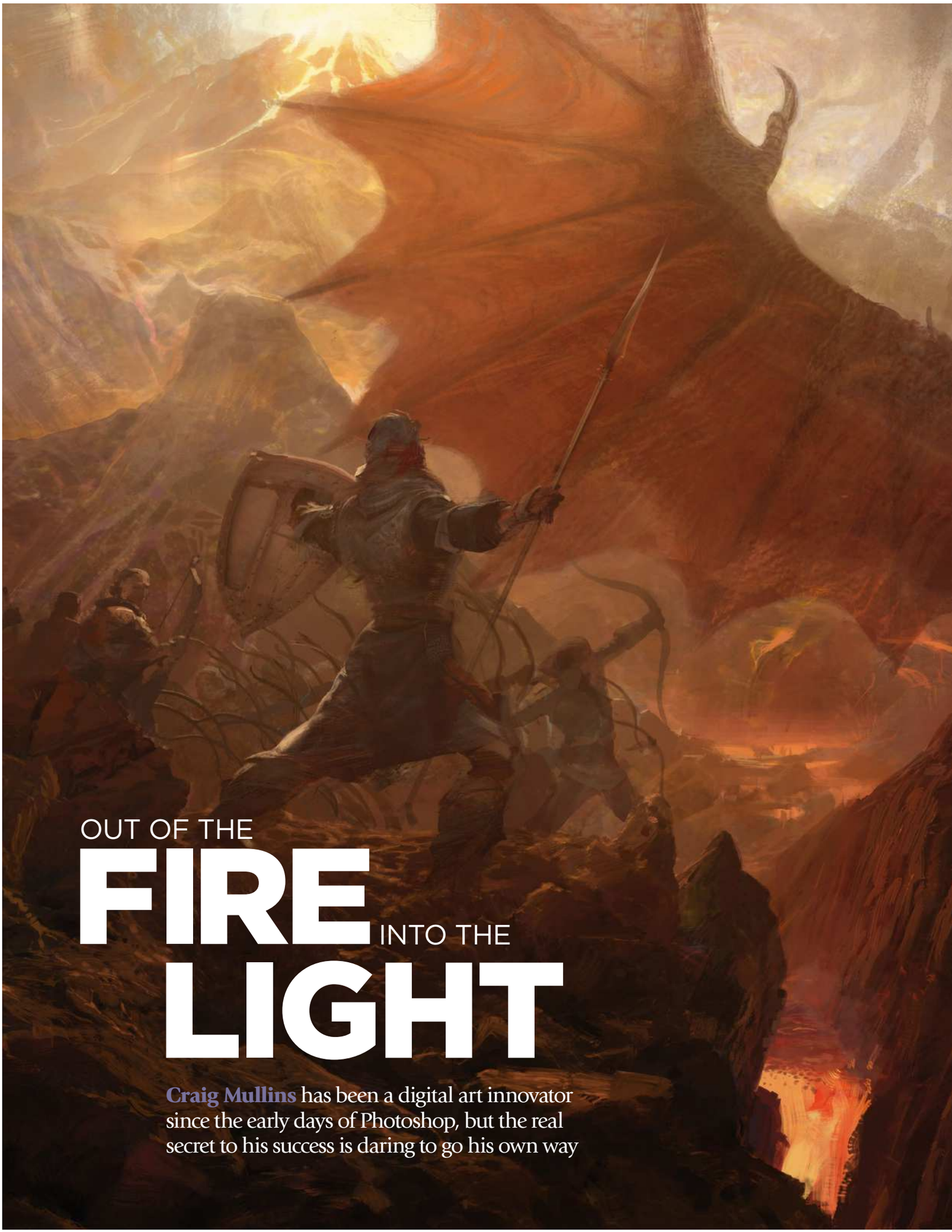
KEVIN JENKINS 114

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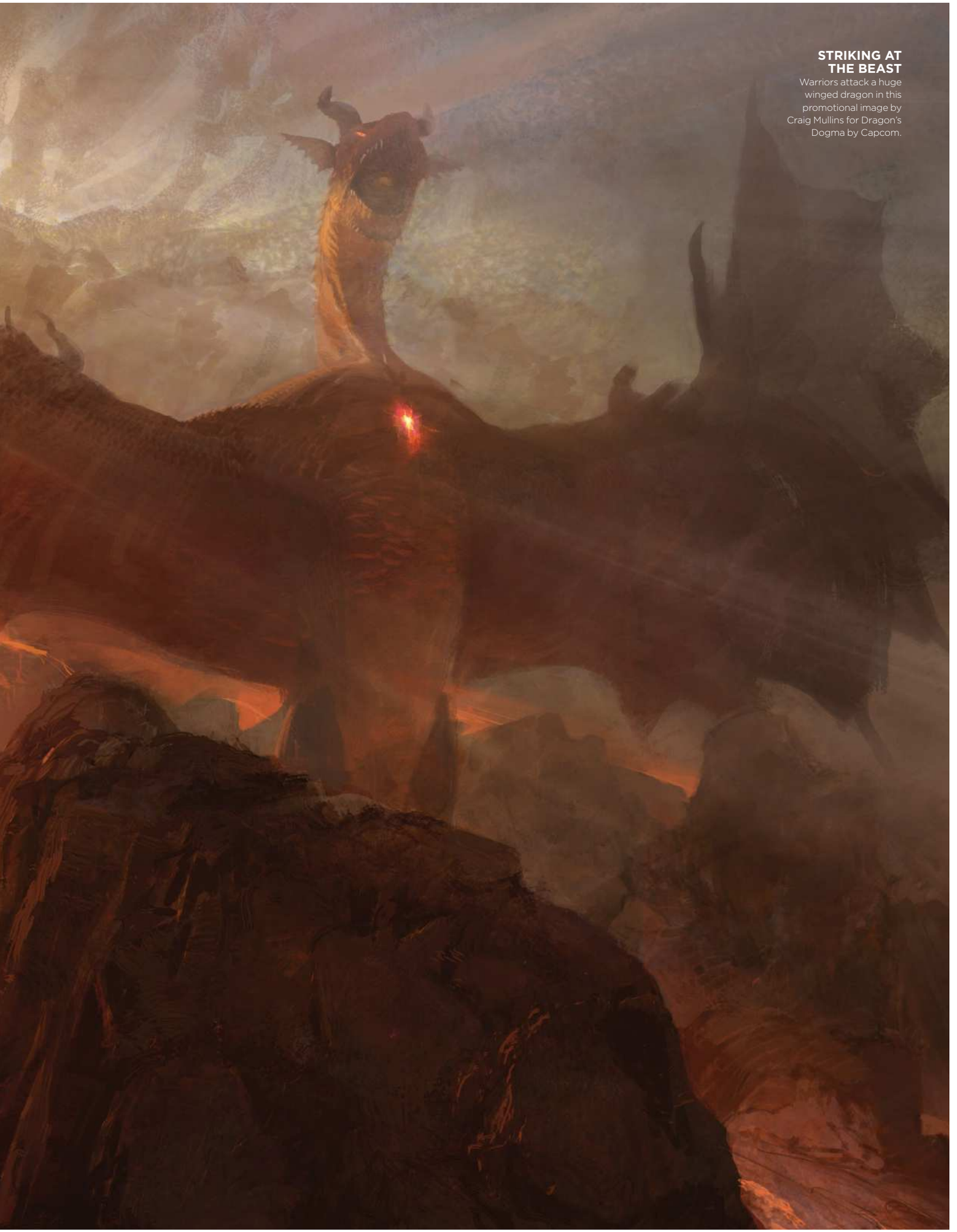
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OUT OF THE FIRE INTO THE LIGHT

Craig Mullins has been a digital art innovator since the early days of Photoshop, but the real secret to his success is daring to go his own way

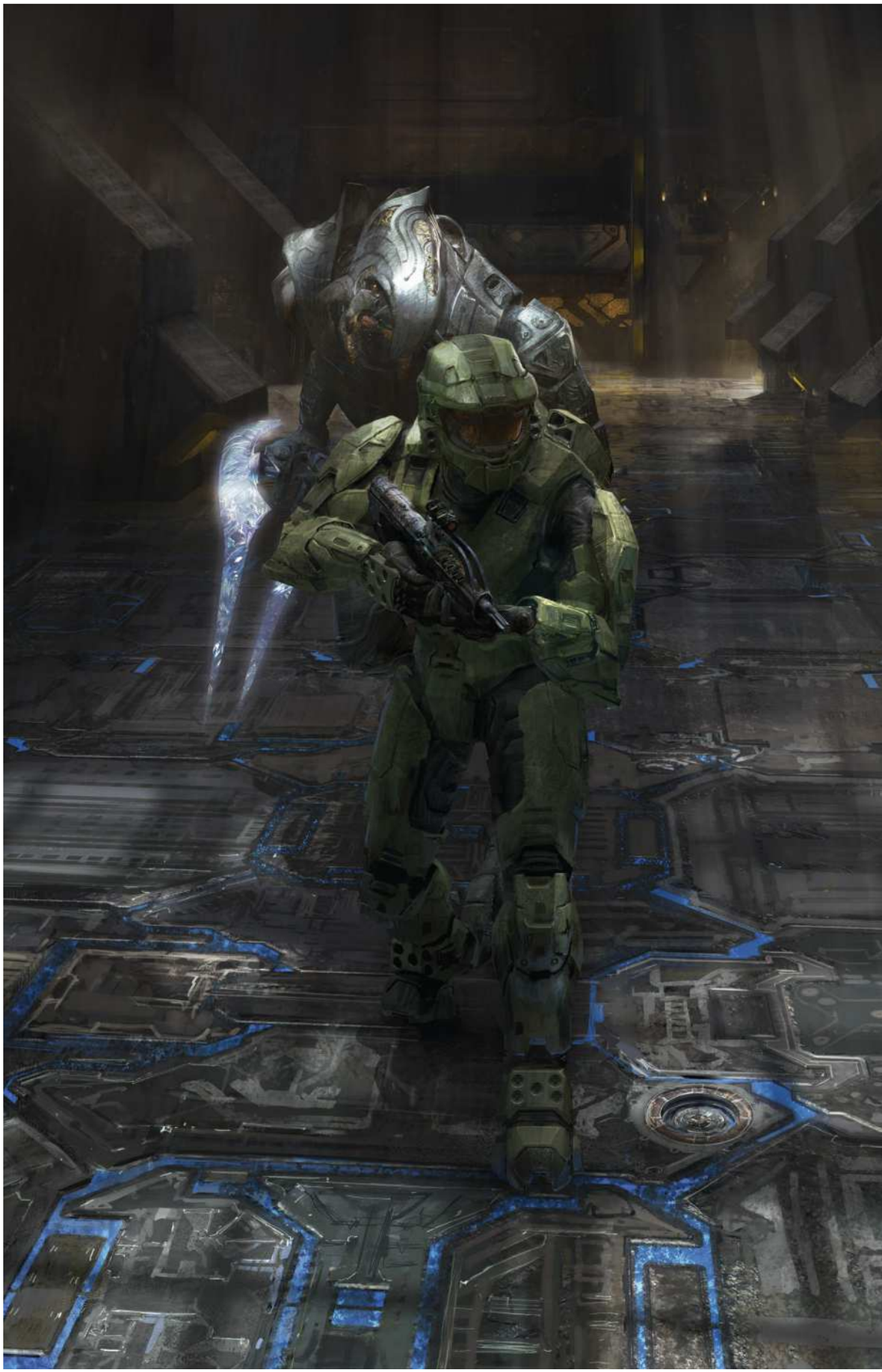


STRIKING AT THE BEAST
Warriors attack a huge winged dragon in this promotional image by Craig Mullins for Dragon's Dogma by Capcom.



CRAIG MULLINS
Location: Colorado

Craig has been working for film studios and games companies since the early 1990s. After making his name at ILM, he struck out as a freelancer and moved to Hawaii. He's since relocated to Denver, where he continues to draw, draw and draw.
www.goodbrush.com



BEWARE THE DERVISH
A promotional image painted by Craig for Bungie's Halo 2.



BOSS DEMON
Another promo painting for the 2012 Capcom game Dragon's Dogma.

Often when we interview artists, the first thing they tell us is that they were drawing at an early age. You always imagine a toddler prodigy creating The Last Supper in crayon, one foot off the ground in the living room corner, with rapt parents and sage art experts looking on admiringly. Craig Mullins may well have been a talented youngster, but his story's refreshingly different.

For instance, it will surely give many struggling young artists a little more hope to learn that Craig Mullins – today one of the most lauded concept artists in film and video games – was nowhere near the top of his art class.

"I got a D in high school art – that's pretty hard to do," he reveals. "My dad was very upset. He said, 'You can't get good grades in math or science, you can't even get an A in art!'"

Once you've heard Craig's James Cameron anecdote, you'll also be amazed that his young career wasn't cut off in 1997. Titanic had just come out and Craig was waiting to meet with Rob Legato, who was an effects supervisor on the film. He sat reading a brutal review of Titanic in Premiere magazine.

"So I'm looking forward to seeing Titanic and I'm sitting there reading this and laughing, 'cos it's so funny," Craig recalls." Someone comes into the office behind me and asks what's so funny and I'm like, 'It's so funny, this thing's ripping Titanic a new one.' It was James Cameron. I saw it was him and pretended I didn't recognise him."

We might not be talking about him now if the Titanic director had turned nasty, but Craig went on to do matte painting and concept art for films such as The Matrix Revolutions and Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within, as well as the BioShock, Halo and Assassin's Creed games.

FOCUS ON SUCCESS

After high school, Craig attended Pitzer College in Claremont, California, to take classical art training before going to the Art Center in Pasadena, one of America's most prestigious applied art institutions. There, he discovered that reducing distractions improved his artwork. After the first few semesters, his tutors were telling him that he had no talent and was wasting their time and his money. He needed to turn things around, so he shut himself away and put in some long shifts of hard work all on his own.

"After the first few semesters, his tutors were telling him he had no talent and was wasting their time and his money"



"Working alone meant I could digest those first three semesters…"

"I digested everything I'd been taught to that point. There were very contradictory ways of drawing a figure I couldn't make sense of, but working on it alone without all the pressure of doing the classwork meant I could digest those first three semesters, which are by far the most important as they're the basis of everything. I came back after 12 weeks and I was getting A-plusses in all these different classes I was failing before," he says.

After graduating, Craig found work in Hollywood creating concept art for movies in the mid-'90s. He discovered digital tools and, while working with ILM, became an early beta tester for Photoshop. Originally embracing it in order to work with colour balancing, he practised what he calls photo bashing: using pieces of photos – figures, backgrounds, whatever – he'd comp together concept pieces.

OUT OF THE ORDINARY

Occasionally, he'd send Adobe feedback on how to improve Photoshop with concept art in mind, but he feels the company saw the area as rather lowbrow. Nevertheless, the Scrubby Zoom function introduced in CS5 was his suggestion. Hold your cursor over the point you want to zoom into, hold both mouse buttons and move left to zoom in and right to zoom out. It's dead quick if you're using a stylus instead of a mouse.

Working digitally meant that Craig could amend a piece faster than a painter, although there were plenty of limitations and lots of crashes in the mid-'90s. He also realised that thanks to this new thing called the internet, he might not have to work on-site anymore. He started demonstrating email to the people he worked for, but it took a while to convince them to get AOL accounts and look at his work when he sent it in. All the while, Craig grew frustrated with driving from Malibu to Los Angeles to work with art teams.

Eventually, he took the bold steps of going freelance and moving to Hawaii. In much the same way he had eliminated distractions when he was at the Art Center, moving away from the studios enabled him to get away from creative group-think and grow more as an artist.

"Doing it in isolation has been useful to me because I got to a place that I wouldn't have had I continued to work at ILM," he says. "I went off and developed on my own, and the influences on my work are esoteric and a little bit geeky. If I was working in a place, the force of the personalities I was working with may have imprinted themselves too much, whereas the influences that I ended up being infected by were more my choice. I had the whole world to choose from – great artists and musicians from the past – as opposed to people I'm working with."

Being far away in Hawaii didn't put production designers off working with him. In fact, it added to the kudos. "I think that because I moved to Hawaii, more employers were like, 'Wow that guy's so good he can move to Hawaii, let's get ourselves some of that.'"

MOVING ON UP

After 15 years in Hawaii, Craig and his family went to Philadelphia for a year before moving to Denver in July 2015. He's about 8,000 feet above sea level, which is a good metaphor for his career, seeing as so many of today's concept artists look up to him.

One of his favourite projects to work on was Darren Aronofsky's 2014 film Noah. The concept work he



FINE BALANCE
Artwork for a limited edition print for Assassin's Creed 2.



INTRICATE DETAILS
The complexity of Age of Empires 3 was captured in Craig's images promoting the game.

"I was staying up all night doing this stuff. It was a compulsion, even though I should've been working on real work"



GALLEON DISASTER
Sailors end up in the soup, as Craig paints a progress image for Age of Empires 3.

did for it is fantastic in both scale and detail, and he basked in the level of trust that he received from the production designer. Craig would draw it, and the crew would start building it. Being an atheist, though, he had reservations about the film's message. Other favourite projects, he says, were the game Age of Empires and the all-CGI feature Final Fantasy.

However, it's the personal work he did between 2000 and 2005 that he believes catches the eye of other artists. It changed his style, he says, and it underlines his belief in cutting out distractions and focusing on being better at what you do. "I was staying up all night doing this stuff and I just had to do it. It was a compulsion, even though I should've been working on real work. I just had to go paint a pirate at night and it was gonna be so cool," he says.

Today, Craig is doing something similar again. The computer's been put to one side and he's drawing like a demon, filling up sketchbooks and thinking about how he'll tackle painting some of the sketches. Printouts of digital work just don't have the same energy as paintings when hung in a gallery. Teaching is also a new avenue he's exploring, and he's been on the circuit giving talks throughout 2015. Watch for an upcoming tutorial on Schoolism.com.

What's his next goal as an artist? "To relax," says Craig. "I've been beating myself into dust for a long time. I don't have many more mountains to climb, I hope. To a certain extent, would you ask the same question of a plumber? You've reached the apex of fixing pipes. I sort of look at myself as a worker in that way. I don't think there's anything inherently special about being an artist. Artists who wait for inspiration need to just get at it."



OUT SHOPPING
Concept art Craig did for Incinerator Studios, on an unpublished game.

ARTIST ON ARTIST

Thomas Scholes waxes lyrical about Theo Prins'

Lion's Arch

Theo's mastery is visible here not only in what he has painted but especially ***what he has not painted****. Note his care in crafting a captivating* ***variety of contrasts****: light to dark value, saturated to neutral colour, warm and cool temperatures, soft and hard edges, high to low frequency of detail – all is used to convince and entice. This* ***selective inclusion and exclusion*** *of the elements of art and design not only crafts an illusion that viewers can enjoy but also skilfully* ***allows room*** *for their own imaginations.*



THEO PRINS
Location: US

Theo is an artist with a passion for environments. He spends his time drawing urban sprawls and travels for inspiration.



TOM SCHOLES
Location: US

Tom is a respected digital painting instructor and concept art/visual development artist also specialising in environments.







Q&A

KEVIN JENKINS

The veteran concept artist and Supervising Art Director at ILM London shares his experience of working his way up and reaching the top of his profession



DRAGON
An evocative concept painting by Kev for an undisclosed project.

What was the art scene like in the city that you were brought up in?
I grew up in the 1970s in Southampton. I don't think there was an art scene as such. I put myself through a Technical Illustration course locally. There weren't many of us, and most on the course were interested in producing line art exploded views of engines and aeroplanes. I used the course to learn airbrushing and detailed perspective theory, which I still refer to every day.

When did you realise that being in the arts was your destiny?
I was rubbish at everything else, so I had no choice. Art as a career in the early to mid '80s was a leap into the unknown as schools simply didn't know how or if you could make a living at it.

What was your worst job starting out?
From the age of 18 I have only ever been a professional artist, so I'm lucky in that I have never really had a rubbish job. I've had a few rubbish assignments to do through the years, if that counts...

When did you start creating concept art, and what was your big break?
I was working as a Digital Environment Supervisor and matte painter in the film industry. I just rolled over into concept design more and more, eventually creating and running the first fully fledged art department at a

KEVIN JENKINS
Location: London

After 13 years as an artist in publishing, advertising and games, Kev joined the VFX industry on the BBC's Walking With Dinosaurs. After work on The Golden Compass, he Art Directed War Horse, Dredd, Edge of Tomorrow, Guardians of the Galaxy, Avengers: Age of Ultron, Star Wars VII: The Force Awakens, and many more. Kev is currently Supervising Art Director at ILM London.
ifxm.ag/kevjenkins



© Marvel

MIMIC
RIGHT After six months concept development on the exosuits for Edge of Tomorrow, Kev spent nearly a year on "all things Mimics," including this alternative design.

GUARDIANS
LEFT A stunning visual for Marvel's Guardians of the Galaxy, on which Kev was brought in right at the start of production.



© Warner Bros



CREATURE
ABOVE A concept artist needs to be able to turn his hand to more than just costumes and environments.

"The key lesson I've learned? If it feels wrong, it is wrong. Change it no matter how long you've spent on it"

VFX facility in the UK. We worked on over 50 visual development projects, including creature and character design for Dredd and World War Z, sets for Zero Dark Thirty, and environments for Marvel Studios films.

When did you switch to digital?
In about 1993 I invested in a PowerMac and Photoshop – back then it had no layers and no Undos! Digital is both a good thing and a bad thing: it can cover up the weaknesses in some of the basic art skills. I overlapped for a good five to six years, switching between the two depending on the requirements of the job. The thing to remember about digital is that it's just another tool. If fundamental art skills are missing from your skill set then Photoshop or Zbrush won't save you.

Is there a key lesson you learned at the start of your career that you use to this day?
If it feels wrong, it *is* wrong. Change it no matter how long you've spent on it.

What would you say is the best thing about working at ILM London?
Working alongside some of the finest talents in the world that share the same passions. Most artists can be very selfish about their work, but ILM and VFX in general fosters collaboration. Working as a team is not about "beating" the artist next to you but working with them to create the best design possible. The skill set across the global art department at ILM is second to none, and to be inspired every day by the talent around you drives you on.

Can you name two of the strongest characters you've worked with in the industry, and what have you taken from them?
Rick Carter has been the production designer on some of the most iconic films made in the last 30 years. No-one has taught me more about the thought process



"I see artists feeding ideas off of each other rather than coming up with their own"

© Marvel

behind movie design than Rick. Kathy Kennedy is an incredible person to have had the opportunity to work with. I first met Kathy [when I was working] with Rick on War Horse and that eventually led to me working for ILM and Lucasfilm.

What's your single strongest attribute as a Lead Artist and Art Director?
To break down the brief like a puzzle and try to present the answer back visually. Painting is the easy bit. As Art Director it's my responsibility to ensure the artists deliver the right vision as well as the quality.

What strikes you most about the new crop of artists who've come through in the last five years?
I wish more of them would try to stand out from the crowd and be more individual. I see a huge number of artists feeding ideas off of each other rather than coming up with their own. As I look around the web at the explosion of concept art, I see how most up-and-coming artists concern themselves only with technique. Painting a picture is relatively easy, coming up with a good idea is not. It is very collaborative.

Is personal artistic style irrelevant in commercial concept art? What's more important?
I believe that individual artistic style is incredibly important – it shows what you can really do. The most talented artists are the ones that can flip styles depending on the brief. Those artists that lock themselves into one way of doing things don't realise how limiting they are to work with.

What's the climate of the film industry like now compared to when you started in it?
Bigger and faster. The teams on shows now are huge and the time frames are incredibly compressed. Those with the right skill sets have plenty of work to do.







FRIGGA'S FUNERAL
ABOVE Kev's sweeping visualisation of Frigga's death and funeral from Thor: The Dark World, on which he worked with his friend Charlie Woods.

WAR HORSE
LEFT Preproduction painting for Steven Spielberg's 2011 film War Horse, on which Kev worked as Art Director. Concept art isn't all about futuristic fantasy scenes!

ARTIST ON ARTIST

Jon Schindehette talks about Thom Tennery's

Gethen Rising

*"Thom Tennery is a **talented concept artist**, and has a credit list that is quite enviable. Not only have I loved working with him, I just enjoy seeing how he brings his **creativity and innovation** to his concepts. I am always inspired by his work. His environments are always epic and reek of **immense scale** without resorting to the dreaded 'put this little figure in the corner for scale'. His vehicle concepts are always **a fresh take** on what we assume we know, and his mood shots have the knack of **drawing you into** the scene."*







JON SCHINDEHETTE

Location: US

Jon is an award winning art/ creative director with over 30 year of experience in the creative industry. Clients include Disney, Hasbro, Wizards of the Coast, Harley-Davidson and many more. Best known for his work with Dungeons & Dragons and ArtOrder, Jon is Creative Director for Treehouse Brand Stores

theArtOrder.com



THOM TENNERY

Location: US

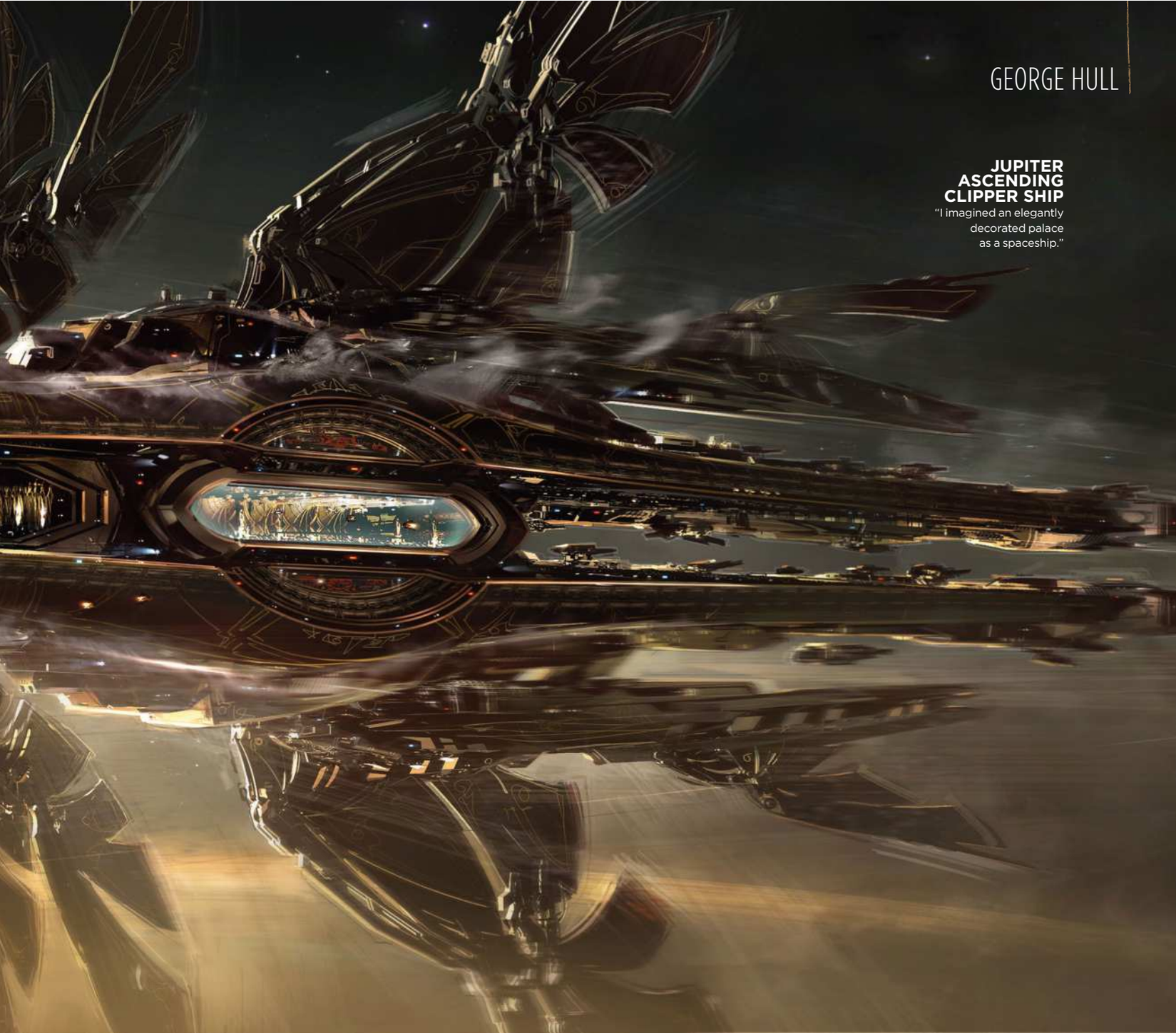
Thom has a degree in architecture and studied entertainment design at Art Center College of Design. He has worked on TV and film productions and video game development, and has illustrated trading card games and book covers. His clients include Universal Pictures, Disney and Wizards of the Coast.

www.thomlab.com



ENGINEERING THE FUTURE

George Hull, one of Hollywood's premier film conceptual artists, discusses his path from apprehensive daydreamer to achieving his dream job



JUPITER ASCENDING CLIPPER SHIP
"I imagined an elegantly decorated palace as a spaceship."

All Jupiter Ascending artwork © Warner Bros.

As a concept artist, George Hull has helped shape the stunning imagery of films such as Jupiter Ascending, The Matrix Reloaded, Cloud Atlas and Elysium. "I help draw and paint ideas for the look of a film's set, architecture, vehicles and environments," he says. "This is the most exciting part for me – I just love discussing an idea at the start of a day and, by the end, having a piece of art in my hand."

Like many, George found art as a boy. "My artistic passion was ignited watching Alien, Blade Runner and Star Wars," he says. "Likewise, my earliest artistic heroes were Ralph McQuarrie, Syd Mead, Joe Johnston and Moebius." However, he cites landscape painter Edwin Church as a defining influence. As a child he would spend hours in the Cleveland Museum of Art, gazing at Church's Twilight in the Wilderness. "I was amazed by the piece's mood, detail, technique and his ability to capture scale with pigment and brushes." The work, George says, still inspires him today.

"In high school, I researched my heroes of film design and discovered that almost all of them had an education in industrial design," he says. Architectural, engineering or commercial illustration didn't feel quite right for him, he recalls, but then "one day I saw a car magazine with a conceptual design for a futuristic super car."

Inspired, George won a place studying industrial design at the University of Cincinnati. "I was very aware of the work coming out of the premier schools such as Art Center and California College of the Arts," he says. "But my ID program didn't teach car design or the flashy techniques that I saw other students learning."



GEORGE HULL
Location: San Francisco

Born in India and raised in the US, George joined ILM just after graduating with a BSA in Industrial Design. After seven years he left to form George Hull Design.
www.ghull.com



ORNATE SPACESHIP DOCK
"I juxtaposed high-tech and low-tech to create an ornate docking bay with statues and chandeliers."

Indeed, Art Center put out a calendar every year filled with futuristic cars and high-concept vehicles. "My jaw would hit the floor when I saw it. I would get stomach pains worrying about my competitors. My school assignments were to design a next-generation vacuum cleaner!" He recalls thinking: "I'll never be that good. I felt overwhelmed with the competition and confused. How could I get my skills even close?"

STEEL AND DETERMINATION

George didn't give up, though. Rather, he did something he says every aspiring artist should do: he decided that if his assignments were mundane, he would challenge himself and push his skills forward himself.

"I would draw complex perspectives instead of simple side-views. I would create interesting scenarios and work on my technical draftsmanship. I would explore new painting techniques." This approach, he says, keeps him growing as a creator even today. Not every film, he reminds us, needs high-concept ideas. Some require the basics. But even then, he tries to advance his artistry.

Despite having to compete with students from all over the world, some of whom attended colleges with dedicated automotive design courses, George secured internships with car companies. But then he learned there was little of the imaginative work that had excited him. "Getting the Chrysler and Ford apprenticeships was critical in my path, because I got to talk to the staff designers and see what my life would be like in the future – the reward I was striving for," he recalls.

"I found out that very few people get to do conceptual work," he reveals. "Most of the jobs involved real-world manufacturing details of the same type of product." This was a huge let-down for George, doubly so as he realised he'd still have to work like a dog to secure an automotive or product design job at all.

"On an internship at Chrysler, I remember sitting in a bathroom stall for an hour, thinking about my path. Where would I be in five years? All roads seemed to lead to disappointment, regardless of how hard I worked."

"Wanting a job in film design felt like saying you wanted to be Han Solo for a living"

END OF THE ROAD

Finally George admitted to himself that the job he really wanted was in film design. "That felt like saying you wanted to be Han Solo for a living," he says, but he grasped the nettle and committed to the film industry.

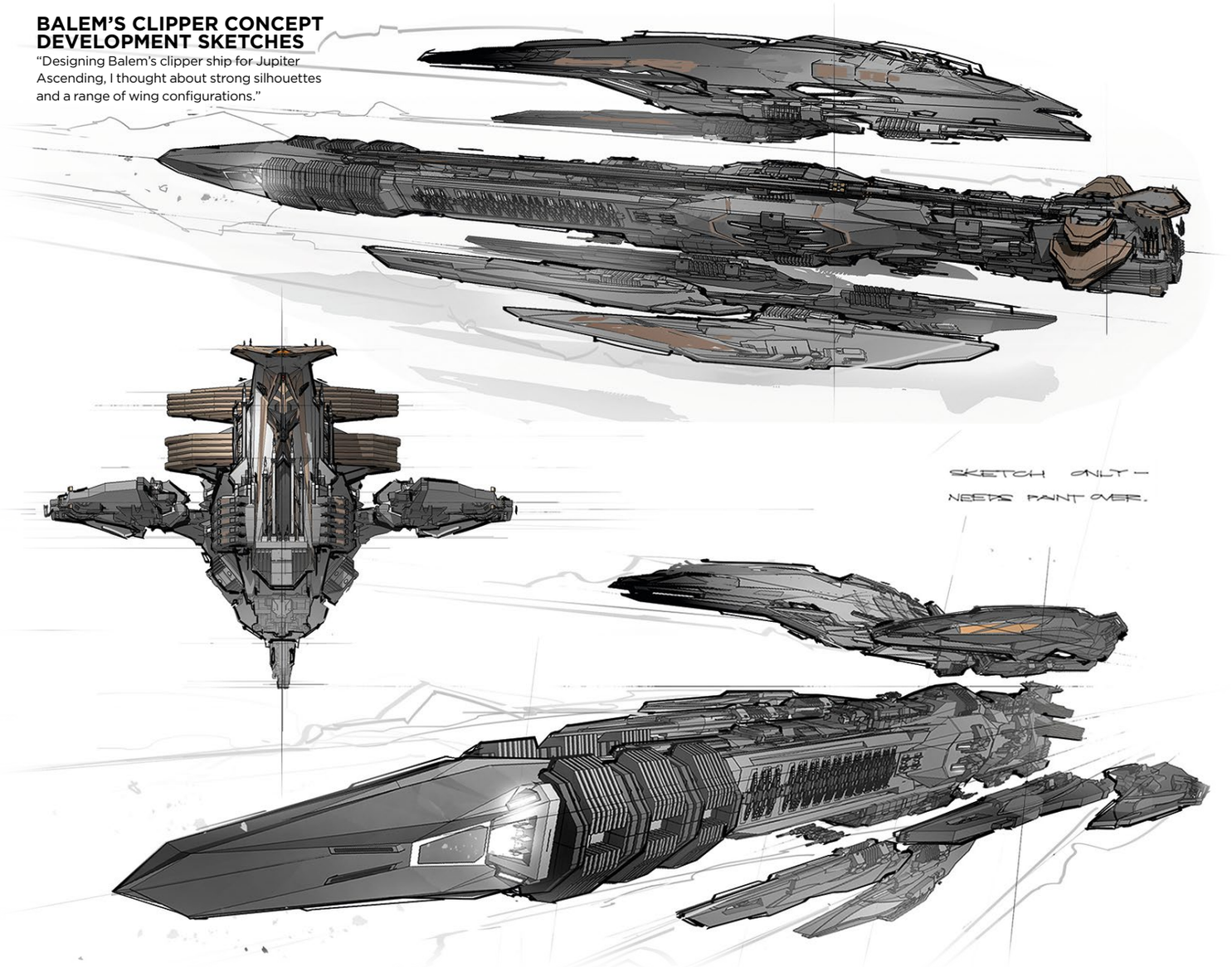
George's school wasn't impressed. It branded his decision ridiculous and wasteful. But looking back, George says he was, at that point, a man on a mission. "I heard that Lucasfilm had an internship program," he recalls, "and I decided that was my goal."

Yet doubt still lingered in his mind. "If car design was competitive, the ILM art department spot was going to be ultra-competitive," he thought at the time. Was his dream realistic? Were there a million other artists better than him? And if it didn't land him a film job, would

ROBOT TESTING LAB
RIGHT "Environment, mood and lighting study for the film Chappie."

BALEM'S CLIPPER CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES

"Designing Balem's clipper ship for Jupiter Ascending, I thought about strong silhouettes and a range of wing configurations."





© Sony Pictures



SALVAGE SHIP CONCEPT
"Here's the Aegis Reclaimer and its salvage drones, which I painted for Star Citizen."



ARMOURED PATROL SUIT
"My idea was for floating cannons and wing segments that could arrange themselves in different configurations."

he be shooting himself in the foot for even a decent ID job? It was all or nothing.

"I tried to be smart. My college thesis was a tele-operated robot, designed for hazardous emergencies or disasters such as Chernobyl. I wanted to define myself as a high concept designer who thinks about function as well as styling," George says. "It won Best in Show and got me into the ILM internship. I still remember listening to the phone message saying I was accepted, and falling to the floor!

"At ILM I was elated to be working with, and learning from, the artists and model makers from Star Wars, Indiana Jones and Jurassic Park," George says. "Many of them were my childhood heroes, such as Dennis Muren. He selected me to work on the Special Edition of The Empire Strikes Back, and the Jurassic Park sequel. I was obsessed with learning the craft."

George moved through the ranks at ILM and was quickly promoted to VFX art director. "It was a fantastic job and great for the ego," he says. "But my tasks were mainly leadership, meetings, delegation. There was very little time for creating artwork myself. I knew my skills were not growing to the level of my heroes, people who were involved with creating film from the earliest stages," he says.

Once more, George reminded himself who he wanted to be as an artist, and after six years at ILM, he hung up his hat. Unemployed, he spent the summer working on

"I feel good design comes from a combination of thoughtful problem-solving and blue-sky thinking"



All Cloud Atlas artwork © Anarchos

his portfolio and sent it blind to the directors of the Matrix movies. "I yelled with excitement," he recalls, when the phone rang and he was offered a place on the Wachowskis' design team. "Working so close to the creative process and with the directors was a dream job."

DAYDREAM BELIEVER

So, what inspires his work today? How does he fire the furnaces of his imagination? "Music," George replies. "When I work, I set the mood with soundtrack music and I play it loud."

Despite the often futuristic nature of his art, George's creations are born in a very basic world. "I like to start off in blue pencil, ink and a sketchbook," he explains. "I'll thumbnail ideas for large environments. From there I'll jump into a 3D or 2D workflow and explore the big pictures." Yet a critical part of his process doesn't involve any drawing tools or media at all: "I think daydreaming is highly underrated," he says.

George's daydreaming took on a forceful form for Jupiter Ascending, where he was asked to design a new visual vocabulary for several dynasties, each decorating its spaceships in different ways. The task, he says, always starts by breaking the spell of the blank page.

"I always look to the story first. I discuss everything with a director or production designer. I ask about the feel or theme that should be conveyed." Usually, he reveals, they'll use emotional adjectives like elegant, imperialistic, aggressive or scary. For one of his tasks on Jupiter Ascending, George needed to create a ship design that was strong, elegant and highly decorated: "I used cues from Siamese fighting fish and Art Deco, as well as a beautiful Rajasthani dagger and pistol."

Summing up his take on the creative process in his chosen field of endeavour, George says: "I feel good design comes from a combination of thoughtful problem-solving and blue-sky thinking – and finding the intersection where both can work together."

Just as we go to press, the artist tells us he's got the call to work on a new project. He can't say precisely what it is, apart from revealing that it's his "favourite franchise of all time." Clearly, George's dreams have come true.

CLOUD ATLAS SUBMERGED METROPOLIS

"How would society adapt and survive? I love thinking through a design challenge, using my imagination as well as stylisation skills."

ARTIST ON ARTIST

Aaron Blaise talks about Andy Harkness' work on

Moana

*"Andy to me consistently demonstrates what it is to be **a great concept artist**. He is extremely talented, which translates into an incredible **versatility of styles**, moods, palettes and subject matter. When I was a director at Disney, Andy was one of our go-to guys that could always deliver when we needed something not only done quickly, but also done with **thought**, **care and skill**. He's continually challenging himself. He is currently working on Disney's Moana. I feel his work really captures what we know of the South Pacific islands, **and goes beyond**. He caricatures the world through style and colour, elevating it visually to something we'll all want to **explore and experience** on the big screen."*







AARON BLAISE
Location: US

A graduate of Ringling College of Art and Design, Aaron worked as an animator for Walt Disney for 21 years on Beauty and the Beast, Mulan and many more. He was co-director of Brother Bear, for which he was Oscar-nominated.
creatureartteacher.com



ANDY HARKNESS
Location: US

Starting as a clean-up animator on Pocahontas, Andy went on to visual development and design on Lilo & Stitch, Bolt, Tangled and Frozen. He also really loves bugs, hence his kids' book Bug Zoo.
www.instagram.com/andyharknessart



DONGLU YU
Location: Montreal

Donglu was a concept artist at Eidos Montreal and Ubisoft, and is now Senior Concept Artist at Warner Bros Games Montreal. Credits include Far Cry 4 and several Assassin's Creed titles.
donglu.artstation.com

Q&A

DONGLU YU

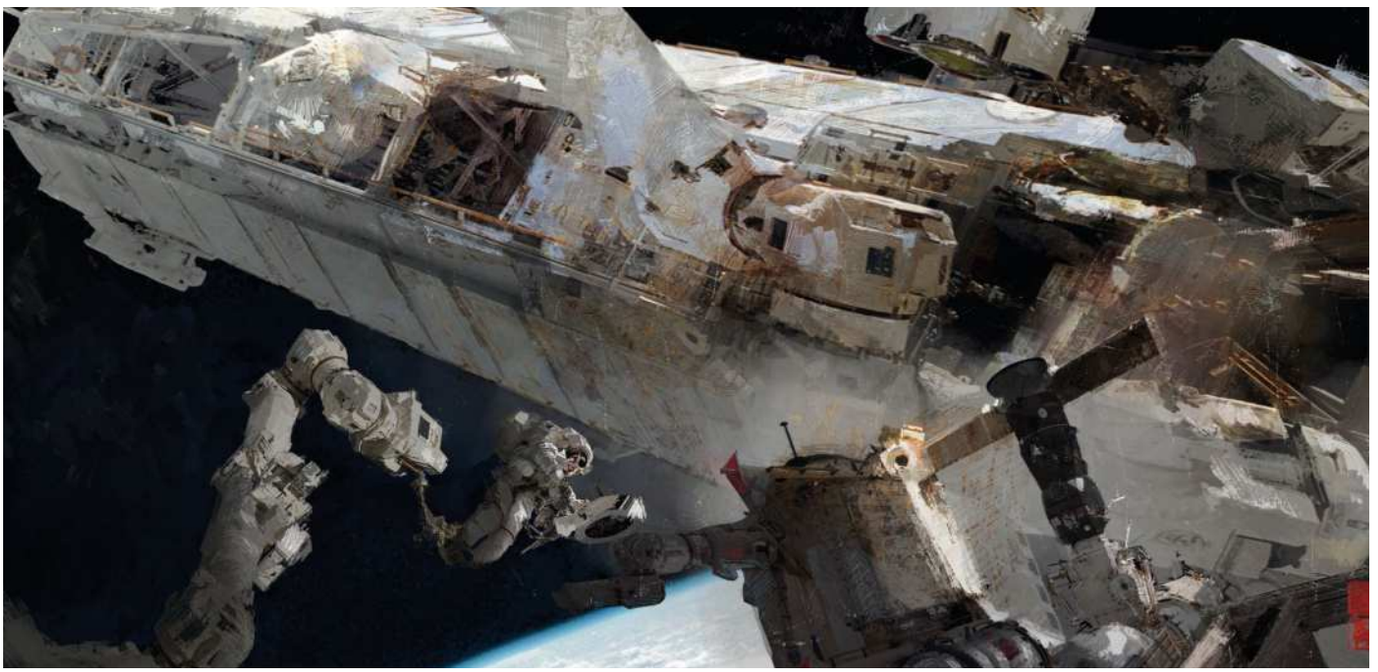
Despite a background in traditional arts, the Montreal-based concept artist emphasises teamwork and the collaborative side of her role



When did you realise that being in the arts was your destiny, and why were you set on that path?
I have been doing traditional arts since I was 10 years old. I studied Chinese watercolour, drawing from observation and oil painting before studying Illustration & Design at college and Film Animation at university. I soon found out that animation was not for me, as I was much more interested in digital painting than making characters move on paper cels or within software using a rigging system. At that time, concept art was still a very new field, which meant it was harder to find resources to ascertain what constituted an adequate portfolio and how to get behind those iron curtains. I studied all the Gnomon DVDs on digital painting and actively participated in the CGtalk forum to get people's feedback on my work. That is when I met my husband Jack Zhang, who was a character artist at EA Montreal at that time. He helped me enormously to get input from professionals and gave me constructive feedback on my portfolio progress, until I got my first video game job offer at Eidos Montreal.

What's your current job? Where were you working before, and how did you get here?
I am working as Lead Concept Artist at WB Games Montreal. I have worked as a texture artist at a local company, and a concept artist at Eidos and Ubisoft before landing my current job at WB Montreal. Being a lead doesn't require only the artistic skills, but it

CHASE TIME
This personal piece shows Donglu's talent at deftly creating an entire world. It won the CGSociety Master Award in the Concept Art category in 2013.





also requires a solid understanding of the whole production pipeline, being able to communicate with 3D artists, foreseeing any potential production blocks, being able to respect the department deadline set by the higher management team, and so on. As a result, I have less time to create artwork at work and I need to drive the whole department forward by giving proper briefings and feedback to my team members.

What's your single strongest attribute as a digital artist working in games?

I believe it is the fact that I have always been a good listener. Being a concept artist, I need to listen to my art director's needs; being a lead concept artist, I need to listen to the higher management team's needs, the 3D artists' needs and the concept artists' needs. Only by listening carefully and clearly understanding people's requests can I perform my job well within the professional context.

What's struck you most about the new crop of artists coming through?

My team is mostly composed of young artists. They

SPACE STATION
ABOVE "I don't spend more than 40 hours on a painting," Donglu says. "Beyond this and I have a tendency to linger on small details. Know when to stop!"

ARRIVING
LEFT In this striking piece Donglu uses dramatic lighting and carefully-judged size cues to convey a sense of majestic scale.

INTO THE DESERT
RIGHT Concept art must not only create a sense of place but also convey a story, as hinted at in the detail of camels, clothing and architecture here.

"Being a lead concept artist requires not only artistic skills but solid understanding of the whole production pipeline"





RUINS
"I've learned so much about producing concept art from the talented people I worked with," Donglu says, but "what matters the most is the team work, not the concept art itself."



MEDIEVAL LORD
LEFT Donglu won the CGSociety Master Award in the Character category in 2013 for this piece.

are motivated and passionate, they are humble and ready to accept constructive criticism. For me, in a professional context, the attitude is more valuable than the actual art skills themselves – although, of course, the art skills have to meet a certain entry-level bar as well. That is because when the art is not strong enough, I can still mentor the junior artists, but when the attitude is wrong, it would be very hard to adjust inappropriate working habits.

How would you describe your style – or is personal artistic style irrelevant in commercial concept art?
Because of my traditional art background, I do enjoy a personal style with more painterly feeling, with obvious brush strokes. However, the current industry trend is to do cleaner and more polished renderings at a fast pace. Thus, I had to adjust my approach and make more use of 3D tools in my painting process.

What's the climate of the games industry like now, compared to when you started in it?
It is much more competitive to become a concept artist now. As I mentioned, the field was so new when I started that I had trouble finding enough resources to fully understand this particular field. But now, schools and online education are blooming, catering for the large young public who have the dream of becoming a concept artist. I have seen juniors of 20 years old with an incredible level of digital painting skills, and that is really impressive compared to the old climate.

Who are the contemporary concept artists that make you feel like you need to work harder?
I have been really enjoying the artwork of Thom Tenery, Thomas Scholes, Nathan Fowkes, Eytan Zana, Marat Ars, Michal Lisowski, Jesse Van Dijk, Theo Prins and many others.

Is there an art scene in the city that you live in, and what's it like?
Montreal is one of the biggest bases for the video game industry – we have many big game developers such as Ubisoft, Square Enix/Eidos, WB Games, EA Motive Studios, Bethesda Game Studios. We also have medium-size and indie developers for other diversified products, such as Behaviour Interactive, Hibernum, Ludia, etc. In terms of digital art education, we have Dawson College, NAD Center, Ubisoft Campus, Syn Studio, etc. So we have a great talent pool here to contribute to upcoming projects. We also have local outsourcing studios, such as AptitudeX, which play a key role in the ecosystem of the Montreal gaming industry.

"My personal style is painterly, but the industry trend is to do clean, polished renderings at a fast pace. I had to adjust my approach!"

INDUSTRY INSIDER

There are some hot career opportunities, especially mobile gaming and concept art. But should you stick with a studio or go it alone?

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CAREERS

Mobile art hits the big time!

Changing times With high-end art in demand, we find out how artists can tap into the new world of mobile gaming



THINK OF MOBILE GAMES AND YOU MAY think of a bright, shiny fad like Bejeweled. But as devices get more powerful, they're actually nearing the quality of AAA games for PlayStation 4 and XBox One.

As mobile gaming becomes big business, the money's not just going to coders but to digital artists, too. So is this a potentially lucrative new market for your art skills?



Jack Gilson, lead artist at Wooga, urges you to shed any preconceptions about mobile. "It's one of the largest platforms for games right now," he says. "People who'd usually never have

LEFT Character designs by Daniel Djanie for a circus-themed game that, like many, was never released.







ABOVE Because it's a hidden object game, the background art in the newest Wooga hit Agent Alice is key – players will spend a lot of time examining it.

FAR LEFT Infinity Blade by Chair Entertainment and Epic Games, the first iOS game on Unreal Engine.

LEFT Another character style exploration by Daniel Djanie, this time for a space-war themed title.

played any type of video game, such as grandmothers, are now doing so." Even free games are becoming cash cows, by charging for add-ons and access to extra levels. So artists are increasingly in demand.

"Companies like Gameloft and Zynga are spending mega bucks on art teams," says Jack. "With most mobile companies now, the team sizes are getting way bigger, as art quality needs to excel to stand out." Take Gameduell, where Daniel Nikoi Djanie is head of illustration. "Despite having been in the business for more than ten years, we're currently reinventing ourselves – and one major part of this change is a strong focus on high-quality artwork," he says. "Our team is growing continuously. At the moment we're 20 people led by Rockstar's former art director Ian Bowden and myself."



And we're not just talking about 3D art. As Jack explains, "2D will always have a place in mobile games, because although more games are becoming rendered sprites, they're essentially all hand-sketched first and then made in a 3D software package. Concept artists will always be needed."

ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

While 3D artists on the whole are better paid, Daniel believes 2D art can be more rewarding creatively. "Being a 2D artist myself, I feel that I have more possibilities in this area for artistic expression," he explains, "because the individual artistic identity is



Daniel Nikoi Djanie

On what mobile game art can offer artists...

What's behind the new focus on art in mobile gaming?
For years, art was considered as a relatively disposable element to mobile gaming. Now the industry is moving in the direction of more artistic quality. The impact of indie titles and art-driven games such as Angry Birds, Monument Valley or Bastion are in my opinion the reason for this change.

What are the benefits to artists of working in mobile games?
As a newbie you have the chance to work on more different aspects of game art when you work for a mobile company. In AAA production often you'll be stuck in one area, which can be very frustrating if, for example, you only produce the same kind of assets. The production cycles are generally much shorter for mobile games, which means there are more opportunities to create new stuff. Often productions can run parallel, which leads to more space for daring projects.

What about downsides?
You're often producing art for the recycle bin. Thanks to the shorter production cycles, projects are cancelled more often than in AAA game companies. The time pressure in the mobile game industry also leads to compromises in the quality in order to achieve the production milestones.

What advice can you give artists looking to get into the mobile game industry?
Show that you know your skills. Understand that your portfolio is only as good as your weakest work. And show that you're passionate for what you're doing.

Daniel is head of illustration for Gameduell. He previously worked as a freelancing illustrator and animator.
www.gilmec.carbonmade.com

"Mobile gaming is moving in the direction of more artistic quality"



Concept art for Infinity Blade III. The dragon was based on real-world creatures, including an elephant, an alligator, a bat, and a lobster.

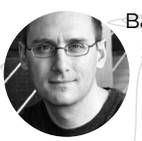
more secondary and exchangeable in 3D artwork."

Donald Mustard, creative director of Chair Entertainment – the company behind landmark iOS game Infinity Blade – also stresses the possibilities for creative expression. "Modern devices are very powerful and so artists can now more fully realise their visions and ideas than ever before," he says. "We're now seeing huge diversity in the art direction of different games, from retro to realistic and everything in between."

Of course, not every mobile game will demand high-end art. "The degree of visual splendour depends entirely on the tone and point of the game you're designing," says



ABOVE Fireproof's The Room is a physical puzzler within a mystery game, inside a beautifully tactile 3D world.





Barry Meade, co-founder of Fireproof Studios. "Many titles are successful because of their game mechanics or player involvement or whatever, and aren't art heavy or visually focused – Minecraft being an obvious example. But in specific cases, like our game The Room, the game wouldn't be the same if we didn't go all-out to create as fabulous-looking a world as possible. Generally, you can think of great art as a multiplier: it helps to sell things, but without other aspects in place to work with, it makes little impact."

Right now, mobile art teams are relatively small. "This means as an artist you're a bigger cog in the machine," says Jack. "Your work is more visible, a lot falls down to you, and you also need to be multi-talented. If you want to do more on an art team and have smaller game production cycles, then mobile is a fantastic choice." By contrast, he says, in a console games role you'll probably "work longer hours and not make as much of an impact until you're at a senior level."

NO EASY RIDE

Of course, there's a flipside to all this. Mobile is no longer an easy way into the games industry for the newbie artist. For example, Fireproof mainly recruits experienced artists from AAA companies such as EA/Criterion, says Barry. For Gameduell, Daniel says: "Either you should be a generalist able to combine artistic abilities, technical understanding and a sense for the user



ABOVE Another concept piece from Infinity Blade III, this time featuring a striking-looking warrior in gold.

experience, or you're a specialist who's outstanding in their artistic field."

Wooga, similarly, is looking for the same level of skill and qualifications as if you were applying to a big AAA company, says Jack, adding: "We lean towards the more stylised art style, so coming from a background in cartoons and animation helps greatly."

But it's not all bad news for up-and-coming artists: "Juniors and interns are still invited to join mobile games companies," Jack says. "In fact, some juniors these days know more than some of the old seniors." And with smaller teams in mobile, you'll face greater challenges but also, potentially, greater opportunities. Or as he puts it, "You can learn more in mobile – but you need to come in hard and be fast at what you do."

A new concept for your career



LEARNING

Syn-chronised study

Canada's premier school of concept art offers a diploma taught by top-name artists

SYN STUDIO WAS FOUNDED IN 2007 BY Anthony Walsh, who went in with the ethos that "great artists are not born, they are made." The school has gone from strength to strength, now adding to the mix an 18-month, full-time concept art diploma programme that's taught by leading industry professionals.

The concept art diploma is the first of its kind and is designed to give students a solid foundation to become professional concept artists armed with the right skills, techniques and workflows. "It was developed over the course of three years with help from top concept artists and educators, most notably Scott Robertson, who has personally trained some of the world's most successful concept artists," says Anthony. "Many people want to work as concept artists, so to beat the competition it's very important to train with the right people," he adds. "To graduate with cutting-edge skills, you need training from professionals working in the industry right now. We don't hire full-time teachers and book their class schedules way in advance, because then they aren't working in the industry any more."



PROFESSIONAL STANDARD

In the past year alone, the school has provided masterclasses by the likes of Remko Troost, Christian Robert de Massy, Donglu Yu and Jeong H Shin, among many more. These top tutors will act like the student's art directors, Anthony says. "They require students to use the same pipelines and procedures, submit the same set of production-ready assets and hold them to the same standards of quality and professionalism as they do in the industry" – and this includes the 2D and 3D workflows increasingly used in the industry today.

To qualify, Anthony advises, you need to demonstrate through your portfolio, letter of intent and interview that you can draw well using basic principles like proportion, perspective and anatomy, can use value to convincingly show form and cast realistic shadows, use colour and understand colour theory, are comfortable painting digitally in Photoshop and can create original concepts that show potential for interesting design.

Many of Syn Studio's past students are now living their dream, but only 20 students are accepted per programme. For more, see www.synstudio.ca/concept-art-diploma.

ABOVE Esteemed concept artist Donglu Yu is on the Syn Studio teaching staff roster.

RIGHT Remko Troost, who created concepts for the Assassin's Creed franchise, passes on his personal industry knowledge.

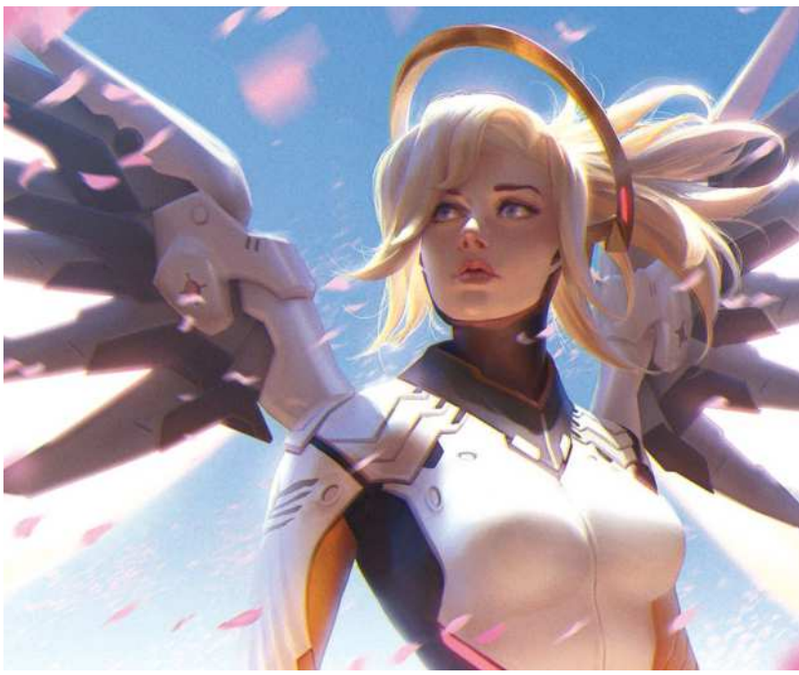


FAR RIGHT Student Michael Klukowski created this pro-quality piece for Syn Studio's vehicle and mech design course.



"Many people want to work as concept artists. To graduate with cutting-edge skills, you need training from professionals working in the industry now"







CHOICES

Freelance vs studio

Nine to five Go it alone, or find your feet in a studio? Each has its advantages and disadvantages, but which is right for you?

MELBOURNE-BASED CONCEPT ARTIST and illustrator Darren Yeow failed at being freelance twice and moved back to studio roles. It's only in the past five years that he's successfully carved a path for himself – and he wouldn't have it any other way.

However, he emphasises, "freelancing is a serious undertaking that requires wearing numerous hats to pull off successfully. As a freelancer, you're running a small business, which requires many non-art-related skills that studio artists don't need to have."



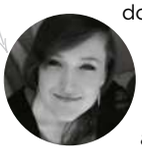
What skills? "Things like client billing and chasing payment, keeping the books up-to-date, dealing with taxes, health cover, putting funds away for retirement, insurance, and investing in skills training. These are on top of actually getting client work done."

LIFESTYLE CHOICE

Yet along with the admin, self-discipline and time constraints also comes the ability to choose your clients and enjoy life. "What I love most," says Darren, "is being able to see my two-year-old son growing up every day. Plus being able to offer him an alternative look at how career and life can intertwine. And, of course, getting paid to do that!"

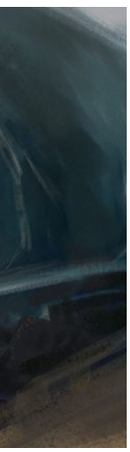
Jana Schirmer, a freelance artist and illustrator based in Berlin, adds: "A nice side-effect is that you get to work on a lot of different projects, instead of just working on one for years in a studio. I love doing concept art and I love illustration, and I'm able to do both as a freelancer."

Dealing with clients, however, can be a challenge. Simply getting payment can be struggle. But as Jana explains, it all comes down to the correct contracts.



"Don't start working before you see a contract," she says. "Once, I started working for a small client when I had just





ABOVE Jana Schirmer's fan art of Overwatch's Mercy. She says it's important not to undersell yourself as a freelancer.

FAR LEFT Weta's Christian Pearce, who painted this piece, is an advocate of working in a studio.

LEFT Darren Yeow recently painted this on top of his usual workload.

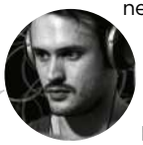
started freelancing. After finishing the work, I never heard back from him. It wasn't very smart on my end."

But, Darren says, you can take certain steps to ensure you're on the right footing. "Nightmare clients tend to be new clients, so I begin dealing with them before they turn out to be nightmare clients," he explains. "First, the client understands that I intend to enter into a mutually beneficial relationship – not a dictatorship. I'm there to bring flesh to their vision, with their guidance. But I'm not a doormat, and in order to bring about the best outcome, we need to respect each other's skill sets and worth.

"You're running a business, which requires many non-art skills that studio artists don't need"

"If you communicate this part in the right way, this won't offend good clients. In fact, most will appreciate this as a mark of one professional to another – but it will bring out red flags in egotistical prima-donna types."

However, working within a studio doesn't necessarily mean you can escape difficult clients, either.



"If it's clearly going nowhere I'll just step away," says Blazing Griffin lead artist Paul Scott Canavan. "Don't make a fuss. Sometimes these people are just going through some trouble, and I always try not to burn bridges."

FUN AND GAMES

Having art-directed Distant Star: Revenant Fleet, The Thirty-Nine Steps, Dino Tribes and APB: Retribution, Paul has worked on a range of huge projects and puts a safeguard in place. "I always ask for 50 per cent of the commission up front and only deliver the final product on receipt of the second 50 per cent."

While you can't escape difficult clients either way, working in a studio does allow you to flourish in creative collaboration, gaining constructive criticism and building friendships to help you produce the best work possible. "Freelance life is great in many ways – oh, how I miss 11am starts! – but there's nothing like working with a group of friends to inspire you and make every day exciting," continues Paul.

Weta concept artist Christian Pearce agrees. "I love the people and all the interesting stuff that happens here. Weta is different to most design studios in that there's a full workshop here – engineering, 3D, model-making, moulding and casting, sculpting, paint shop... Every time you get out of your chair you bump into people doing something you don't know how to do."



Whether getting into the industry through internships or going it alone, it comes down to getting on with people, Paul says. "I turned down a couple of fairly large jobs because I didn't feel ready and was afraid of meeting new people," he says. "But the longer you spend in this industry, the more you'll learn that everyone is just like you, really. Take the plunge – it's always worth doing!" ●



Thomas Frick

This artist started off in a studio, then went freelance

What did you learn working in a studio?
Joining a studio enabled me to learn how to work in a team and be part of a process. But more than anything, it meant I could improve myself fast – a lot faster than when I was at university.

What made you decide to go freelance?
I'd already started doing freelance jobs when I was in the studio, and I didn't want to join another studio immediately afterwards. Even though I was scared, I thought I had to try being my own boss. Step by step, I managed to make enough contacts to earn enough money to live and eat. I tried to diversify as much as possible. Now clients approach me. I'm pretty comfortable, but it took years to reach this point.

Do you prefer working in a studio or being freelance?
Personally, I'm really happy with my current freelance position. Being in a studio brings a lot of advantages, but there are many advantages in being freelance too: being able to choose your working hours and holidays, having awesome rates if you're talented and reliable, being your own boss.

Any advice for other artists?
Be curious and keep trying to improve yourself with what you see. And most importantly, don't fear the future!

Thomas is a 2D and 3D artist working in games and graphic design. He has a master's degree in art and multimedia. ***www.xaelgraphics.com***



ABOVE Thomas Frick found time to paint this character for a personal RPG project.



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